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ABSTRACT

A practicum at a licensed, non-profit family day care agency in Canada serving over 4,000 children and their families was designed to assist in clarifying the meaning of family support and family-centered child care. The practicum was developed to assist the agency in moving towards operationalizing its commitment to provide optimal family support to families receiving its day care. Interviews with staff had confirmed that there was confusion regarding the definition and application of family support. The solution strategy included intensive work on a short-term basis with two agency staff groups. The development of a working knowledge of family support philosophy, principles, practices, and approaches was emphasized. There was also work to develop family support "champions" who were expected to provide leadership to their colleagues. A pretest-posttest evaluation showed that the practicum intervention effectively increased participants' understanding of specific family support concepts. The training appeared to build a foundation to support future strategies to enhance family-centered practice. A particularly significant outcome of the practicum was the development of a discussion paper, "Moving towards Family-Centered Day Care." (Six appendices present highlights of training sessions, the discussion paper on family-centered child care, best practices, a case study, evaluation forms, and feedback forms. Contains 40 references.) (SD)

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ED 409 102

Enhancing the Family Support Component of a Family Day Care Agency

by

Martha Lee-Blickstead

Cohort 1F

A Practicum Report Presented to the
Master's Programs in Life Span Care and Administration
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Science

Nova Southeastern University
1996

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Authorship Statement

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. Where it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other workers in the field and in the hope that my own work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

November [illegible], 1996 Martha L. [illegible]

Date Signature of Student

ABSTRACT

Enhancing the Family Support Component of a Family Day Care Agency Lee-Blickstead, Martha, 1996 Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Master's in Life Span Care and Administration Descriptors Early Childhood Education/Family Support Family Day Care Family-Centered Child Care Early Childhood Education/Training Theory Practice Relationship Parent Involvement Delivery Systems Child Caregivers Family/School Relationships Parent/Staff Relationships Organizational Change

This practicum took place in a licensed, non-profit family day care agency that provides child care to 4000 children and their families. The mission states that the agency provides quality child care programs as well as family support services. During the practicum proposal, interviews were conducted with over 25 staff and focused on the family support component of the agency's service. Interviews confirmed that there was confusion regarding the definition and application of family support.

The practicum strategy was designed to assist the agency in clarifying the meaning of family support and family-centered child care. It was also developed to assist the family day care agency in taking its first steps towards 'operationalizing' its commitment to provide optimal family support to families who are currently receiving family day care. The solution strategy involved intensive work on a short-term basis with two agency staff groups. The development of a working knowledge of family support philosophy, principles, practices and approaches was emphasized. A pretest/ posttest evaluation confirmed that the practicum intervention effectively increased participants understanding of specific family support concepts. This training built a foundation to support future strategies to enhance family-centered practice. The practicum also worked to develop

family support 'champions' who were expected to provide leadership to their colleagues. One significant outcome of this project was the development of the discussion paper, 'Moving Towards Family-Centered Child Care'. This practicum took place in a political environment that promotes economic restraint and creates uncertainty for those working in the child care sector as well as families receiving child care services.

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Chapter I

Introduction and Background

In Chapter I, the history of the agency in which the practicum problem occurs is described. This history highlights the shifts that have occurred in the agency's philosophy and service approach in its work with children and their families over 145 years. In addition, the political realities of the mid-nineties and their potential impact on the agency's service is discussed. My role in the practicum setting is also presented.

The setting in which the problem occurs

The agency in which the practicum takes place is a licensed, non-profit charitable organization that has been helping children and their families since 1851. Its history exemplifies the evolution of social services in Ontario, Canada. Originally, the agency was founded as a Protestant Orphan's home which provided care, protection and education for 'underprivileged' children. In the late twenties, the community expressed an interest in locating care for children in more home-like environments. The agency responded by introducing foster care programs while continuing to operate a residential program component. This began a new era with a movement away from institutionalized care for young, healthy children. The agency's foster care program flourished from the 1930's to 1950's. During this period, the profession of social work also became established and introduced new approaches for working with 'needy' families. The principles of social work became incorporated into the philosophy and approach to service delivery in this setting.

Another philosophical and programmatic shift took place in the 1960s. There was an increased emphasis on keeping children in their own homes with the assistance of community supports. This agency recognized that many families needed short-term day care without a residential component. They also recognized that there was a growing demand for child care services as more mothers returned to work outside the home. In 1966, a family day care program was piloted by this agency. A casework approach was adopted based on the historical patterns of delivering service in foster care. This approach allowed the agency to introduce a new service while using existing staff expertise. During the early development of the family day care program, professional staff resources were available to provide intensive family counseling and practical support for parents in addition to family day care for young children. Case loads were relatively small. "This traditional casework model assumed that a high standard of home care for children could be achieved through a thorough initial assessment of providers and families, careful placement of children, and ongoing individual contacts with providers and parents . . ." (Kyle, 1993, p. 220).

The agency has continued to increase the number of families served by the family day care program. The agency broadened its service to center-based child care in the late 1980's. It has also expanded its child care programs across a large, Metropolitan area. Hiring practices have been adjusted away from a social work emphasis to reflect the need for enhanced expertise in Early Childhood Education. The agency maintains a similar delivery approach for family day care in the mid-nineties. Sensitive matching of families and caregivers and ongoing support and supervision of caregivers continued to be stressed at the beginning of the practicum work. Unfortunately, as funding is reduced, case loads increase in size and staff resources for family support are reduced.

Currently, this agency provides child care for more than 4000 children in family day care programs and in 21 child care centers. This includes family day care services for more than 2300 children across ten political jurisdictions in a large Metropolitan area with a network of more than 600 caregivers. This service is provided for infants, toddlers, preschool and school age children. Families who receive child care are diverse and include a range of socioeconomic, racial, linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds. The composition of families also represents the many emerging characteristics of the nineties. Many families pay the full fee for their child care. Regional governments provide fee assistance for some low income families. (There is a two year waiting list for families who need financial assistance.) Four managers and thirty-one child care coordinators work to ensure that families receive quality family day care for their children. In 1996, this agency launched a new campaign to raise its profile in the communities it serves. The agency selected a motto, "Next to you, we care the most," to reflect the commitment to build close partnerships with those families who choose to enroll in their programs.

In 1996, the Ontario provincial government is working aggressively to reduce the budget deficit and is reemphasizing the philosophy that families must function independently. This agency experiences the challenges faced by many social service organizations throughout North America in the mid-nineties. The agency anticipates cutbacks in government funding as well as a restructuring of the child care delivery system in Ontario. This has created significant uncertainty for the child care sector as well as the families who currently receive child care. Reduced financial and program support for low income families (eg. housing assistance, employment initiatives) has created additional stress for the families whose children are enrolled at this child care agency. In the current political climate that promotes economic restraint, documented research that confirms the long term benefits of early childhood education and family support seems to have limited impact on government policy.

The student's role in the setting

I am currently employed as a family support specialist on a one year contract. This position was created to assist the agency in 'operationalizing' its commitment to provide optimal support to families who are receiving child care. I have the responsibility for working with the senior management team to develop realistic strategies to enhance the family support component of this agency's service. In this position, I am responsible for reviewing key policies and practices in the family day care program that have an impact on the agency's relationship with families. I am also responsible for providing direction on ways to maximize the use of existing resources and expertise to support families using family day care. This includes the development of new models for promoting optimal communication and partnerships between families and the child care agency. I also will work with the program resource consultants, who lead the initial and advanced training for caregivers, to encourage an increased focus on family support. There is a possibility that agency resources will be made available to families and caregivers who are not currently participating in the agency's child care programs. Opportunities to extend services for those experiencing increased stress due to government cutbacks will be considered.

My background includes over twenty years of experience in community development, child care management and direct programming in a range of children's services. Through a variety of roles, including management positions in the non-profit sector, as a consultant, and as a staff and community volunteer in children and family programs, I have been actively involved in programs that support families. My most enriching and challenging experience in family support has been as as a parent of two active children. In addition to the completion of the graduate course work for the Master's degree in Family Support Studies at Nova Southeastern University, I have also completed a university level certificate in Nonprofit Management and Leadership from York University (Toronto, Canada) and a certificate course in community development.

Chapter II

The Problem

In Chapter II, the problem that the practicum addressed is described in detail. A thorough analysis of the problem includes a review of the literature in the fields of early childhood education, family support and organizational behavior. The findings from an organizational review of the family support component of the agency's services are included and highlight feedback from staff at all levels of the organization.

Problem statement

The mission statement describes the practicum agency's commitment "to build on its historic traditions of innovative leadership. [This agency] is dedicated to the provision of quality child care programs and family support services for children and their elderly family members." Although this statement specifically includes reference to family support services, there are no organizational guidelines that describe what this is, who should be involved or how this should be achieved. There are no specific plans to encourage the application of family support principles and practices or to increase the family support component of service. There is also confusion regarding the meaning or definition of family support.

The Board and management of the family day care agency have inherited a rich history of service that demonstrates an ongoing response to the evolving needs of the family and community. Over time, an intensive social work approach has slowly been transformed into a specialized focus on quality early childhood education programs for young children. Although there have been significant changes in service and staffing, the movement from a deficit approach in service delivery to one that embraces the promotion of family well-being has not been formally communicated to staff.

The Executive Director has made a commitment to explore how family support can be woven into the 'organizational fabric' of her agency. This will be a difficult and challenging transition given that the agency's primary services (licensed family day care and group child care) are highly regulated by the provincial government. In Ontario, the agency becomes licensed rather than the caregiver. (In other jurisdictions, the caregiver may be licensed directly.) The current mandate of licensed family day care agencies does not explicitly include family support. Their main responsibilities include the recruitment and training of caregivers, placement of children in caregiver homes, and the provision of ongoing training and supervision to those who provide child care while ensuring compliance with provincial legislation.

Hiring practices in recent years have targeted staff who have specific professional knowledge and experience in early childhood education. Approximately 31 child care coordinators focus their attention in two areas. These include enhancing quality child care for children from birth to twelve years as well as providing support for the caregivers. These staff act as the main link between the family day care agency and families of children who receive child care. The coordinators conduct a pre-placement interview with families (generally away from the family home) and a placement interview at the caregiver's home. Coordinators are required to maintain at least monthly contact with parents (generally by phone) to ensure that parents are satisfied with their child care arrangement and to provide additional support as requested. In reality, when I conducted interviews during the development of the practicum proposal, I confirmed that contact between child care coordinators and individual families ranged across the continuum from weekly to semi-annually.

In contrast, child care coordinators visit the family day care homes on a monthly basis. They support caregivers and provide guidance in child development, offer program resource information and assist in problem solving. The agency also has three talented program resource trainers who support the efforts of coordinators and caregivers through the provision of formal training. The coordinators' and trainers' primary responsibility is to ensure that the family day care agency provides quality child care for families. The focus on caregiver recruitment, selection, supervision and training occupies most of their time. Consequently, there is limited opportunity to provide family support beyond meeting the child care needs of the family unless problems arise between the parent and caregiver or parents specifically request additional support.

Many family support functions do occur (eg. information and referral) based on the unique skills, training and experiences of professional (child care coordinator) and paraprofessional (caregiver) staff. However, the agency serves a large geographic area and it is difficult for professional staff to become familiar with the diverse neighborhoods in their catchment area. Staff experience difficulty in identifying formal and informal resources within each family's neighborhood. The role that this agency can assume in providing family support is unclear given the significant demands associated with delivering licensed family day care across a large Metropolitan area.

Analysis of the problem

The meaning of family support

The practicum problem suggests that there is confusion regarding the definition of family support and its application in the family day care agency. A review of the literature and discussions with professionals, paraprofessionals and community members confirmed that there are a range of interpretations for the term 'family support.' Terms such as family-centered, family services, parent services and family resource programs refer to a continuum of family support efforts that are diverse and focus on the promotion of healthy families, prevention, family resource and referral as well as intensive family preservation services. Family support is also used to describe the secondary goal for many social service programs (such as child care, housing assistance and employment training initiatives) which strive to enhance the quality of life for families while providing more specific services.

Interestingly, this lack of consensus is not unique to Canada, Kagan (1991) writes about the U.S. experience:

> Throughout the nation, the words "family support" have been interpreted in a myriad of ways. In some circles, family support is a synonym for welfare reform; in others the words designate a particular program; in still other circles, family support refers to the basic set of principles that undergirds any programmatic approach to family development. such disparity in nomenclature reflects broad public confusion about support's meanings and mission (p.18).
>
> (Kyle, 1993, p.1).

Given the range of meanings, one can easily understand why the practicum agency has experienced some difficulty in describing a common vision of family support.

The Family Resource Coalition (Chicago, Illinois) has provided outstanding leadership since 1981 in articulating an evolving set of family support principles that reflect the thinking of leaders in the family support field. These "family support principles were initially formulated as a basis for program development. Today these principles delineate an approach to families that has become basic to the effort in many states [and Canadian provinces] to reconstitute service systems" (Weissbourd, 1994, p. 37). The essential element is the commitment to increase the capacities of all families to nurture their children while promoting true partnerships between staff and parents. These principles provide a valuable framework to assist a family day care agency in articulating its vision of family support:

- The basic relationship between program and family is one of equality and respect. The program's first priority is to establish and maintain this relationship as the vehicle through which growth and change can occur.
- Participants are a vital resource. Programs facilitate parents' ability to serve as resources to each other, to participate in program decision and governance, and to advocate for themselves in the broader community.
- Programs are community based and culturally and socially relevant to the families they serve. Programs are often a bridge between families and other services outside the scope of the program.
- Parent education, information about human development, and skill building for parents are essential elements of every program.
- Programs are voluntary and seeking support and information is viewed as a sign of family strength, not as indicative of deficits and problems.

(Family Resource Coalition handout, FRC Conference, Chicago, IL, May, 1996). The staff at the practicum agency have not had an opportunity to discuss these family support principles or to consider their application in the practicum setting. "Private home day care agencies [have tended] to operate from a more traditional social service philosophy, which puts agency staff in the role of experts and providers, and families and children in the role of clients" (Kyle, 1992, p. 221).

In Table1, Weissbourd (1987) highlights the differences in basic beliefs that influence the design of traditional social services and those that follow the principles of family support. Table 1 was specifically developed to address two approaches to parent education (traditional versus ecological). The second column describes a family support perspective which views children in the context of their families within their relationship to the larger environment. This chart can also be used as a tool to assist the staff at the practicum agency in evaluating how their basic beliefs are translated into program policies and practices. The beliefs that are described in Table 1 (including the concept of parenthood, major determinants of child-rearing behavior, relationship of family to society and method of influencing parental behavior) are all relevant in family day care. The combination of the family support principles provided by the Family Resource Coalition and the review of basic belief systems (Table 1) provide excellent resources that will assist the practicum agency in articulating its core values and a vision for providing family support.

Child care as a family support

The Canadian National Child Care Study (1991) provided leadership by conceptualizing child care ecologically and as a family support and went "beyond traditional studies that tended to focus more narrowly on formal child care services." The authors suggested that child care should be viewed

> not only as a service that enables mothers to participate in the labour force, but

Table 1 Basic Beliefs that Influence Program Design

Parent education moving toward

	Traditional Approach	Ecological Approach
Concept of parenthood	Parents seen primarily in role of child rearers and providers Parenthood seen as synonymous with adulthood, the culminating stage of human development Families viewed as independent units	Parents seem as multidimensional people Development continues throughout life and parenthood is a developmental stage Families viewed in the context of their environment
Major determinants of child-rearing behavior	Information on child development Attitudes about and toward children Knowledge of parent/child interaction	Parental self-esteem Cultural and family background Socioeconomic and environmental factors
Relationship of family to society	Family strength comes primarily from within the family	Family's interaction with larger community is a significant influence on family strengths
	Social change occurs primarily when individuals are able to function well	Social change occurs through community action as well as from well-functioning individuals
Method of influencing parental behavior	Content of program is most important Intellectual development is emphasized Curriculum approach is utilized Individual growth is most important Teacher-learner format is used	Process is as important as content Total personal development is emphasized Social interaction is encouraged Social support systems are essential A broad format for learning is used: teacher-learner, peer interaction, modeling

Reproduced from "Design, staffing and funding of family support programs" by Bernice Weissbourd. In Kagan, Powell, Weissbourd & Zigler (1987). America's Family Support Programs: Perspectives and Prospects (pp.245-268).

also from a broader perspective, as a form of support to families and as a component in children's lives that affects their development and well-being (Lero, Pence, Shields, Brockman & Goelman).

Powell (1987) suggests that high quality child care is, in itself, one of the most important family support systems for working parents with young children. He points out that performance in the work setting, parent-child relations, and other key aspects of child and family functioning are influenced directly by the quality of care. For many families, child care has become an "essential component of the family's external support system" (p. 115). The author has identified four roles that child care can play in its work with parents:

- child rearing information and advice
- emotional support for parents
- role modeling
- referrals

These functions occur in varying degrees in the practicum agency. There are no approved plans in place to strengthen these components in the family day care program.

Larner (1995) describes a number of obstacles that will impede progress towards making child care more family-friendly. These limitations are well known in the child care community and need to be considered when studying the potential enhancement of family support principles and practices in child care. These factors include:

- financial pressures on programs
- the long hours during which services to children must be provided and parent activities cannot be scheduled

- high staff turnover and inability to attract qualified staff
- narrowness and inadequacy of child care training
- the lack of cultural diversity among program leaders and caregivers
- the extent to which child care has come to be defined as a service parents purchase rather than a support provided by the community (Larner, p. 24).

Family day care as a family support

By virtue of its design and mandate, family day care should have enhanced potential to support families in their important child rearing responsibilities. Susan Kontos (1992) focuses on family day care as a family support:

> Intuition suggests that family child care has the potential to be more sensitive to individual family needs and thus to be more supportive of families than are center-based programs. For instance, more flexible scheduling; the informal home setting; mixed ages; a single caregiver; and location in a residential neighborhood differentiate family day care from center-based care, causing many people to view family day care as more closely approximating care by the parent at home and more individualized to family needs. Evidence must be gathered to determine whether our intuitions regarding support to the family by family day care are based on fact (p.10).

It is important to review the important components of family day care to ensure that those elements that are significant to families are incorporated into future changes. A recent study of family day care (Galinsky, Howes, Kontos, and Shinn, 1994) included interviews with staff and parents to determine their definition of a quality family day care arrangement. There was agreement across ethnic and income groups regarding the most essential ingredients. These include:

- the child's safety
- a warm and attentive relationship between the provider and child and
- the provider's and parents' communication about the child (p.58).

The first two ingredients focus specifically on the child care experience. The third element has a direct relevance to family support. Additional studies have suggested that parents' first concern is a competent, caring caregiver (Kontos, 1992). Parents' major concerns beyond the quality of the caregiver involve the logistics of child care which include reliability, location, cost, and hours of service. "Parents look for family day care with flexible hours that is close to home or work, does not require frequently locating substitute care, and is affordable." (p.81-82).

Powell (1987) suggest that efforts to enhance child care-family interactions include increased communication, parent education, and parent involvement in policymaking. One of the challenges in family day care is that the primary communication occurs between the home caregiver and parent during daily 'transition times' including early morning drop-off and evening pickup. This clearly makes communication and parent education a challenge! Caregivers reported that many parents are rushed at both periods. Some caregivers reported that parents will even "call ahead" to make sure that their children are dressed and "ready to go" as soon as parents arrive at the caregiver's home. Caregivers, themselves, also have significant obligations beyond their child care positions. At the end of their "child care day" (which may extend beyond twelve hours), many caregivers must immediately turn their attention to responsibilities with their own families.

In spite of these obstacles, caregivers do seem to provide significant support and resources for families with whom they come into daily contact. Studies have confirmed that there is informal help-giving at the caregiver level. Robert Hughes (1985) studied the extent of parent-provider interactions, topics of discussion and the type of assistance offered. His study suggested that caregivers were "important sources of informal help to parents in dealing with childrearing and parenting concerns . . . These providers appear to be an important link in an informal help network for families that deserve attention from those seeking to develop effective support systems for families" (p. 366).

Currently there are no mechanisms in place for the agency to assess whether the communication between the agency, the parent and caregiver is occurring at an optimal level. Although the practicum agency's child care coordinators currently assist caregivers in working with families, their support seems to be more focused on problem solving between the parent and caregiver rather than encouraging positive support. The agency needs to provide guidance regarding the coordinator's role in facilitating the caregiver's family support efforts. The agency must consider the available staff resources and competencies as well as the coordinators additional program and administrative responsibilities when establishing expectations for these staff.

The move from child-centered to family-centered practice

Kontos (1992) reviewed research that studied family factors as moderators of family day care quality influences on children. A significant finding was that "family background measures generally were better predictors of children's development than family day care quality or other characteristics of the family day care environment . . . Two family variables--satisfaction with parenting and stress--were the best predictors of ratings of children's intellectual functioning and sociability respectively" (p.32). Given that family background is a significant contributor to healthy child development, family day care agencies must reassess their decision to allocate the majority of their resources to the supervision and training of the caregiver. Agencies must continue to responsibly deliver quality child care. However, research findings document that the family has the greatest influence on child outcomes. Therefore, it seems worthwhile to explore new ways to strengthen and support the 'child care' families. A greater emphasis on encouraging adults in their role as parents and assisting them in stress management (with the goal of enhancing child outcomes) may require increased staffing resources at the practicum agency. An alternative solution may be to reallocate staff resources while working throughout the agency to develop the competencies necessary to provide family support.

Powell (1987) points out that day care did not originate as a family support program. "Conceptually and operationally, the primary client has been the child" (p.116). Fenichel and Eggbeer (1990) also suggest that the "domain of professional concern" for infant/family practitioners (including those involved in family day care) has been the domain of the child. When I suggested to one child care coordinator that she entered the profession of Early Childhood Education because "she was interested in the child and family, " I was corrected. "I was interested in working with children!" Consequently, a major challenge for enhancing family support will be the way early childhood professionals are introduced to family support theory. "Melding the basic knowledge, specialized knowledge, and practice skills needed from the different disciplines with the goals, values, principles, and attitudes of family support may be in conflict with some professional training" (Norton, 1994, p. 410).

In the case of this family day care agency, traditional social work principles have been combined with theories and practices of Early Childhood Education. Fenichel and Eggbeer point out that a double challenge exists for those designing effective professional development for staff.

> [Training] must enable practitioners to adapt their knowledge and skills of their own discipline to the specific requirements of work with infants, toddlers and their families [while helping] practitioners remain aware of the larger context of child, family and community resources in which development occurs (p.6).

Focusing on the child within the context of the family and in relationship with the larger environment will require new skills for many child care staff. Dolores Norton also reminds us that this is a pluralistic society and that professionals must view the family "according to the culture and definitions of the family being served."

> This diversity must consider not only individual family structure, attitudes, and values but also the racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, cultural diversity, and world view of the family. Respecting each family, with its own structure, strengths, values, and beliefs, and building on those characteristics on behalf of the child are the assumptions underlying these family support goals" (p. 405).

Parent and staff relationships

Some common themes and issues do emerge in the literature regarding the relationships of parents using child care and the staff who work closely with their children. These present opportunities, challenges and obstacles to the enhancement of family support in family day care. For example, questions are raised regarding the balance of power and authority between parents and child care staff. "When parents and staff interact, how much weight do parental beliefs based on extended experience with and commitment to their own children carry as opposed to the judgment of child care staff based on training, experience and professional objectivity? And what are the boundaries of shared concern?" (Pettygrove and Greenman, 1984, p. 98). Unless staff in the practicum agency discuss these fundamental questions, it will be difficult to proceed towards meaningful family-centered practice.

A number of researchers have studied the adult relationships in child care and have found that these are more problematic than the adult/ child relationships. For example, studies have been conducted that focus on child care staff attitudes towards parents as well as staff's perceptions of parenting abilities (Kontos, 1984; Kontos and Wells, 1986). In the first study, child care staff were asked "to identify parents in the center whose parenting abilities were held in high or low esteem" (p. 50). Parents in the high and low esteem groups were then interviewed with respect to (1) demographic characteristics (2) childrearing values and beliefs, (3) perceptions of the role of day care, (4) perception of day care as a part of a family support system, (5) conformity to center rules and procedures, and (6) perception of the affective relationship with the center (eg. satisfaction, conflict, similarity of childrearing etc.). Results demonstrated that parents were held in high versus low self esteem based on similarity of childrearing techniques to staff; frequency and type of communication (highly role-oriented versus more personal relationships) with staff and parents' willingness to comply with the rules and procedures of the program. This study found that the differences in teachers attitudes with regard to parenting techniques

> appear to be a part of a larger picture characterized by differential communication patterns and family support systems . . . The picture of low-group mothers as more

> authoritarian, less positive, more likely to be divorced, and having scant family and social support systems points to the possibility of role overload (p.58) . . . [and] results in negative impressions of parents by staff (p.65).

Kontos and Wells suggest that those parents who are most likely to benefit from enhanced family support as a part of their child care are less likely to receive it given the staff's negative evaluation of their parenting behaviours. They challenge caregivers to "acquire sensitivity to the needs of all parents, not just the communicative, friendly ones who share similar values" (p. 66).

Kontos (1984) studied the congruence of parent and early childhood staff perceptions of parenting and concluded that staff do have a tendency to make more negative judgments about parents childrearing practices. In addition, although parents did rate their parenting skills more highly than the child care staff, a survey discovered that the parents in the study were concerned about their own parenting abilities. One would assume that the child care coordinators and caregivers would be easily accessible, resourceful contacts for the parents of young children who are seeking information on child development. However, Kontos raises concern over the "potential adverse impact negative attitudes between parents and staff may have on establishing mutually supportive relationships" (p.5). The practicum agency provides family day care to families from diverse backgrounds. Their challenge is to ensure that staff develop supportive attitudes that demonstrate empathy and sensitivity to families across the spectrum.

Child care staff have been characterized by ambivalence regarding the value of their work and their status. Early Childhood Education graduates have been working hard for many years to achieve professional status which includes respect for their knowledge and skills. One caregiver who is an Early Childhood Educator commented on this role ambiguity: "A lot of people don't consider caregivers as professionals and we are! It is one of the hardest jobs that you can do! Until we are considered people that are worthwhile . . .there will be problems. Parents need to treat us as more than babysitters!" Staff's concerted efforts to be recognized as 'experts' in Early Childhood Education may, on occasion, undermine the confidence and competence of the parents who use child care. This caregiver was sensitive to this problem. In spite of her frustration with parents' attitudes to caregivers, she added:

> I don't approach parents as an expert. Often child care staff approach immigrants with the attitude, 'I am the educator and you need to listen to me'. (I know, I was a new immigrant.) Don't approach the parent as the educator or caregiver . . . Always go out of the way to listen . . . Sometimes the attitude is 'You're a parent, I'm up here' . . . Even if you don't have children think how you'd like to be approached . . . It's also a maturity thing with staff."

Pettygrove et al (1984, p.100) suggest that the uncertainty surrounding the status and role of the child care staff and their efforts to reach professional status combined with families' mixed perspectives and experiences regarding the family's role in child care sometimes has the effect of confusing the relationships between parents and child care professionals. The confusion can lead to tension and conflict that has an impact on the communication between the family and child care staff. Given that family support will emphasize relationships of equality and respect and partnership between staff and families, it is critical that this ambivalence in these roles and relationships be explored by staff involved in delivering family day care.

Based on the preceding research, "questions can thus be raised concerning the influences of the [staff/parent] relationship on children's development and on the ability of child care to provide family support" (Kontos, 1984, p. 10). Powell recommends "concrete, practical assistance to enhance their [staff] relations with families, especially information on how to talk with parents and conduct parent programs, and on community resources available to parents" (p. 127). Currently there are limited opportunities to assist child care staff in exploring their own attitudes, values and relationships with parents at the practicum agency.

> Despite the strong evidence supporting the importance of home-school collaborations, perspective teachers receive little training, information or experience working with parents. Surprisingly few in service programs have been designed to support teachers in expanding or improving their parent involvement efforts (Brand, 1996, p. 76).

During the practicum proposal stage, managers reported that they did encourage child care coordinators to consider the parent's point of view when dealing with conflicts. Managers also reported that they attempted to influence staff and promote a greater appreciation and empathy for families experiencing a range of life styles. However, there are no staff development plans in place to support coordinators in reflecting on their attitudes and values or improving their communication skills to enhance their support to families who are nurturing children. A focus on staff/ parent relationships will be critical in the process of enhancing family support in the family day care agency.

The practicum problem that has been presented is timely and reflects the discussions that are occurring in the family support field at the time of writing. Linking

Family Support and Early Childhood Programs: Issues, Experiences, Opportunities was published by the Family Resource Coalition's Best Practices Project in 1995. The author provides support for this practicum project when she states that the "time is right to examine and experiment with linkages between family support and early childhood programs" (Larner,1995). She stresses that the "critical first step early childhood programs must take to move towards family-centered care" (p. 13) is to work towards a relationship where parents are truly partners. In addition, she suggests that training for child care staff must be adjusted to reflect a new family-centered approach.

Challenges associated with organizational change

Family support leaders who are attempting to infuse family support principles into a traditional organization must understand the fundamental principles and processes of organizational change. Otherwise the organizational dynamics and culture may undermine their efforts. It is crucial that the 'change agent' who is responsible for introducing family support actively model the principles of family support throughout the change process. For example, empowerment is a fundamental value of family support. One goal will be to develop an environment where staff become empowered and assume an active role in transforming the agency. Dunst, Trivette, Deal, (1988) promote this approach and provide some valuable guidelines for 'making it happen' in Enabling and Empowering Families: Principles and Guidelines for Practice.

Bennis and Nanus (1985) describe the dependent variable in leadership as empowerment. According to Bennis and Nanus, effective leaders are able to instill in their staff (and families) a sense of "significance . . [and] competence, meaning development and learning on the job" (p. 83). The agency leaders must demonstrate the "ability to accept people as they are, not as you would like them to be" (Bennis and Nanus, p.53) throughout the practicum project. During my first interview with a manager at the practicum agency, I asked: "What are the qualities or characteristics that are necessary for some-one who is attempting to introduce family support principles into the agency?" Her answer builds on Bennis' and Nanus' work. These comments were illuminating and have guided me throughout the practicum process.

> Be non-judgemental . . . Accept people for all their differences . . . Try to understand why people do what they do . . . Have a positive outlook while motivating staff . . . Have the skills and knowledge about what you are talking about . . . Someone who won't accept defeat and keeps plugging until things happen . . . and has the ability to assess the situation and ask the right questions.

Art McNeil's work, The "I" of the Hurricane: Creating Corporate Energy, also provides valuable insights for staff who are facilitating a transition to family support principles and practices. McNeil suggests that it is critical for senior managers to understand and assume ownership of the vision and core values of the organization. The author discusses ineffective leadership that results when these are poorly developed. "If you are uncertain about your destination, you'll communicate all right, but what will come across is 'Don't follow me, I'm not sure where I'm going' " (1988, p. 58). He refers to 'signaling skills' by which leaders communicate their beliefs through their words and actions. "Senior managers who are ineffective leaders fail because they say one thing but signal contradictory messages through personal actions. Signals provide evidence to followers that the organization's vision and values are genuine" (p. 35).

The management team at the practicum agency recognizes that they have a range of interpretations for family support. In individual interviews, they expressed concern and were hopeful that the pending practicum project would facilitate a process that would bring a common understanding of family support to the agency. After a common vision has been formally adopted in this early childhood setting, managers must provide effective leadership in applying family support principles and practices into the work of the agency. This "ongoing commitment to the principles of family support by [managers] will be needed to encourage and help front-line practitioners to apply the family support lessons they learn during training and their daily work with families" (Larner, 1995, p. 27). If senior managers assume ownership of the family support principles, they will provide effective leadership and avoid behaviors that "unwittingly diffuse instead of focus, confuse rather than inspire" (McNeil, p. 20) the child care staff and families.

Once principles are adopted and an implementation plan has been developed to introduce family support into family day care, challenges still exist. "Predictably, when we try to substantially change the performance of a system, the system resists" (Heil, Parker and Tate, 1995, p.16). Heil et al suggest that an organization has the equivalent of organizational antibodies that attack change efforts. Organizations

> produce the equivalent of 'white blood cells' to fight off 'infection' . . .people consciously and unconsciously, directly and subtly, protect the sense of order and predictability that characterized the organization yesterday" (p. 16).

Resistance to change has to be expected from participants at all levels and must be accepted a normal part of organizational renewal. The Parents Services Project (PSP) experience demonstrates that staff integrate new program initiatives at different speeds "even when they acknowledged that the change could be in their own best interest . . . It takes programs on average three years before the philosophy of family support and practices of PSP are fully integrated and a broad range of services is put in place" ((Lee and Seiderman, 1994, p.8-9).

Heil et al describe organizational leaders as "architects of a new system." In the practicum agency, the management team represents a group of talented architects who seem committed to preparing 'the blueprints'. These managers must design new organizational structures that "clearly communicate that a different set of behaviors is not only desirable but critical to the group's success" (p. 19). Change agents must assist in setting a climate that encourages experimentation with new ideas "even without assurances that they will be proven more beneficial than the old" (p. 19). Child care staff need to be recognized for new styles of behaviours, even when they falter or are unsuccessful in meeting their goals. McNeil suggests that in-house collaboration is another important leadership skill. "To be a leader, you must engage in collaborative efforts. If you're leading people, they will demand the opportunity to contribute to the organization's vision, embellishing it in any way they can. When people are really tuned in, they challenge. Welcome that challenge" (p.80).

Zimmerman and Hurst (1994) present a theory of organizational change that has application in family support work. Rather than applying the linear 'life cycle' approach to organizational change, they discuss the organizational ecocycle which is based on the principles of ecology. Given that a basic principle of family support recognizes the need to understand families within a larger ecological context, it seems appropriate to consider organizational change from the same perspective. These authors suggest that those who embark on a change process would often be better equipped with a "compass" than a "road map" because the outcomes of the change process are often unpredictable and cannot be predetermined. "Transformational change takes place during organizational renewal" (p. 340) and is based on patterns of interrelationships that occur within the organization. One phase of organizational change which reflects the current state of the practicum agency is 'mobilization and renewal'. When an organization is in a "far-from-equilibrium condition, it is acutely sensitive to small inputs to the system [and these] small inputs can produce large outputs" (p.347). The practicum strategy should identify "inputs" that will create the conditions for positive change towards family supportive practice. In organizational renewal, the authors suggest that

> the challenge is not just to make things happen but to first create the conditions under which 'things' are allowed to happen. To manage the organization's change ability rather than change. Creating the conditions includes a variety of processes, such as changing the . . .formal structures or performance evaluation policies (p.351).

A significant role for leaders in family support is to create conditions for the change process to occur. McNeil, Zimmerman and Hurst recommend that leaders who are facilitating the organizational change process (in this case, the formal introduction of family support) should be prepared for different strategies to emerge as staff become actively involved and committed to the process.

Documentation of the problem

Organizational review of the family support component of service

I conducted an organizational review of the family support component of the agency's service during the proposal stage of this practicum project. Interviews were held with over twenty-five staff at different organizational levels and in different geographic locations. This included the Executive Director, Program Director, six managers, a sample of child care coordinators, two program resource consultants and caregivers. I also attended staff and management meetings, an advanced caregiver training session and visited family day care homes and child care centers. Every staff, without exception, was cooperative in sharing information about their own responsibilities and was insightful in their observations about the families with whom they work.

Staff were articulate in identifying the agency's key resources and expertise. They described the overall strengths of the agency that will be utilized in future family support efforts. The significant areas of strength included:

> a history of innovative leadership in responding to family needs in a changing context; expertise in child care; continuity of care for families; the flexibility of the family day care model; caregiver training; the agency parent newsletter; proven track record as advocates for children and families; and human resources.

In particular, the staff expressed confidence in their human resource capabilities. The agency has a large pool of talented, committed professionals who are enthusiastic about providing services to children and their families. The child care coordinator provides the main contact between the family and agency. For this reason, I focused on their roles and responsibilities. Their primary responsibility is to assist caregivers in "offering appropriate physical care and opportunities for learning within an affectionate relationship" (Powell, 1987, p.6). These coordinators have multidisciplinary backgrounds. 60 % are Early Childhood Educators, 14% Social Workers, 5 % Elementary Teachers in addition to university and college graduates in related fields. Child care coordinators appreciate this diversity and reported that the sharing of expertise and resources among staff was valuable. These staff repeatedly expressed their strong commitment to quality child care and to the caregivers who provide family day care.

During the review, I identified a number of family support functions that occur at this agency. Staff sometimes did not recognize that these activities were considered as 'family supports' but intuitively recognized their value to families. The activities that were described during interviews included (1) information and assistance to meet the families' child care needs (2) information on child rearing and child development (3) support in problem solving (eg. child care, academic support, housing assistance, marital and financial issues etc.) (4) active listening (5) advocacy for child care (6) information and referral (7) some intensive personal support during family crisis and (8) the annual family picnic. Individual staff involvement in these family support functions ranged across a wide continuum. The variation may be related to staff characteristics, attitudes and values; professional training; personal experiences in their families of origin; the current composition of families being served and the size of the case loads; the length of employment with the agency and the geographic area served by the individual staff member.

Interview responses indicated that there is general recognition that families using family day care are experiencing stress that specifically relates to their stage of parenthood and is compounded by the need to balance work and family responsibilities. There was also a general concern expressed regarding the reduction of services to families in the mid-nineties which result from significant cutbacks to social service budgets in the province of Ontario. Staff's vision of how the agency could enhance its efforts in supporting and strengthening families also varied. Brainstorming new initiatives was a part of the interview process. An extensive list of family support initiatives were presented by enthusiastic staff who believed that the agency had the capacity to further support families with young children. Their ideas included "TV shows that promote healthy development of children and families; phone networks between families; recreational activities for families within the same community; parent relief initiatives; warm line for agency parents; support for special populations using agency child care such as teen moms and dads and creating a family resource center at one of the suburban locations."

Currently, the agency's contractual obligation to provide family support is specific to low income families within one region. Funding for family support comes from the United Way. The family support specialist was cautioned by managers to realistically assess the ability of the agency to introduce new family support practices given the constraints related to limited financial and human resources. Douglas Powell (1987) recognizes that this process must include a realistic assessment of current programs. "Serious efforts to enhance day care's role as a family resource must begin with a careful assessment of the quality of care provided and existing structures (for example, financial resources and staff training) to support the enterprise" (p.118). In the case of the practicum agency, the potential reductions to government funding for child care has a direct impact on the allocation of current staff resources. Specifically, child care coordinators have been directed to build a full fee client base to off-set potential government cutbacks. This is the agency's main strategy to remain financially viable in case further government cutbacks become a reality.

Definitions of family support from a staff and agency perspective

The staff had a range of interpretations for the concept of family support. When child care coordinators were asked, "What is your definition of family support?" responses were diverse and included:

- "Providing resources, giving advice, sending parent education articles, listening, referral to support groups . . ."
- "Finding suitable child care - That's why families come to us . . .ongoing contact with families to make sure child care is going well . . .The function of the agency is child care and family support is a frill."
- "Providing a family with information, advocacy, referrals, offering resources . . .we want to empower families to do things on their own."
- " Child care by definition is family support."
- " Be there for the parent, counsel parent, find a home that a parent wants - Be sure that they have peace of mind in leaving their child with the provider they can trust."

These selected comments illustrate the variety of perspectives for family support. They range from specific support for the family's child care needs to a more comprehensive approach that includes strengthening and empowering the family.

I was particularly interested in the coordinators' description of the agency's definition of family support. When asked specifically, "What is the agency definition of family support," the following responses were presented:

- " It probably means . . .if a parent asks a question, we can answer it . . .give encouragement to parents in rough times."

- " Same thing as I described above-providing resources, giving advice etc . . . "
- " A monthly phone call to parents. We get funding for this. However, it hasn't been discussed in our group supervision for a long time."
- " Playgroups for caregivers and the children in their family day care homes - Parents like it because they want their children to have the group experience."
- " It's a the counseling component . . .I've never been too sure what it is."
- " Providing good quality child care."

Clearly, there was significant confusion regarding their understanding of the agency's vision of family support. One coordinator recommended that "it is worth clarifying this but agency policy should be general enough that unique efforts aren't discouraged." Another coordinator dismissed this new thrust and commented that "almost all her parents were self-sufficient and didn't really need family support!" In contrast, many child care coordinators were encouraged by the fact that work was underway to clarify the agency definition of family support and requested leadership at the management level.

The existing agency standard for contact between the child care coordinator and family is a monthly phone call. Some coordinators make a concerted effort to reach families. Others literally "gave up" in frustration after trying unsuccessfully for months to reach families. Unfortunately, it is difficult to reach many working parents during the day because their employers discourage personal phone calls. One coordinator even suggested that is was "pointless to call parents about nothing." Many coordinators are adamant that they want to avoid working at nights when phone contacts might be more successful. Parents, as well, are also preoccupied with their own children and business commitments during the evenings. A number of parents have explicitly asked coordinators to stop calling them on a monthly basis. They are satisfied with their daily contact with the home caregiver and may have been involved with the agency for years. Clearly, the communication procedure is ineffective and it is common for communication to break down between the agency and families. The agency needs to develop a new communication standard that respects parents interests and recognizes the dilemmas described by staff.

During the interviews, coordinators expressed some apprehension regarding this future focus on family support. They reported that there were significant obstacles that would need to be considered before family support efforts were enhanced. The following comments present a representative sample of their concerns. Limited time (for staff and child care parents) was mentioned again as the most significant problem. A number of the child care coordinators also argued that the size of their case loads as well as their administrative responsibilities left limited time for family support. A few staff expressed concern regarding some colleagues' negative attitudes towards individual parents and suggested that these would inhibit their effectiveness in providing family support. Staff were also concerned that specific groups of families (eg. those who required fee assistance or single parent families) were stereotyped. One coordinator specifically recommended training that "might change or improve attitudes and help energize staff." Others expressed ambivalence about providing family support for middle income parents. ("I would be hard pressed to figure out what families in the middle income group would need!") A small sample of coordinators were adamant that it was not their role to become involved in family issues. ("I don't think it's appropriate that we should be solving everybody's problems.") Certainly, the staff have articulated a number of significant concerns. These issues must be addressed and resolved before efforts are made to expand family support in this family day care agency.

Basic beliefs that reflect a more traditional approach to service

Many child care coordinators and caregivers seemed to have a more traditional view of parenthood. "Parents are seen primarily in the role of child rearers and providers. . . . Parenthood is seen as synonymous with adulthood, the culminating stage of human development" (Weissbourd, 1987, p. 252). This was exemplified in a conversation with a child care coordinator who was conducting a tour of family day care homes. She sympathized with caregivers who become annoyed when parents take a day off work (for sickness or vacation) and use the child care even though they are at home! "Wouldn't you think that they wanted to spend that time with their child?" The coordinators tend to identify and become protective of the caregivers. They seem to be more supportive of the caregiver's need "for a break" than the parents' need for "time alone". Staff need support in exploring the roots of their attitudes while broadening their perspective so that parents can be viewed as multidimensional.

Some of the original social work practices prevail in current organizational behaviours and are based on a deficit model of service. For example, lower income families who require subsidy assistance are required to participate in a personal financial assessment at their first interview to determine eligibility. (Until recently, some assessment files have been criticized because of the inclusion of negative and highly judgmental comments regarding the families seeking child care.) There is little opportunity, during this first meeting to explore the overall strengths or needs of families. Limited support can be offered until the application for subsidy is approved. This deficit approach focuses specifically on the financial limitations of families who require child care. This traditional approach to social service delivery that classifies families' needs in specific service categories (child care) based on their financial circumstances makes it difficult to provide universal support for families in a more ecological context.

In summary, the organizational review demonstrated that family support was occurring to varying degrees in the practicum agency. However, the organizational review also confirmed that there is significant confusion regarding the definition of family support and its practice. There is not a clearly articulated vision regarding the family support role that the agency should assume beyond the family day care component of service. The agency needs to develop a common understanding of family support, determine how to operationalize the key principles of family support and identify new family support initiatives that are within the scope of current agency resources.

Summary of key factors that contribute to the practicum problem

Powell (1987) proposes two fundamental questions that can assist in our journey:

- Under what conditions are day care services supportive of family values and functioning?
- Which program strategies improve the chances of a good match and close communication between two major socialization agencies- day care and the family? (p.116)

These must be considered as the solution strategy for the practicum problem is developed.

A discussion that focuses on enhancing the family support component of family day care would not be complete without a thoughtful review of the following factors. The family day care program inherited remnants of a deficit approach to families. In this deficit model, family needs were identified by professional staff who acted as experts and assisted families in 'getting help' to solve 'their problems'. New approaches to family support will require a rethinking of the relationships with parents in order that efforts can be more directly related to strengthening families. This family day care agency will need to find new ways to operationalize 'partnerships' between parents, caregivers and professionals who are involved in the family day care program. The term 'family support' has been described as problematic. Given that there are a multitude of interpretations and applications of family support, it is equally important for the management to provide leadership to child care coordinators and caregivers regarding the agency's vision of family support.

The practicum agency has focused its human and financial resources on the delivery of high quality family day care. Professional child care coordinators and trainers are hired with expertise in Early Childhood Education and are primarily interested in the 'domain of the child'. The competencies for the early childhood functions are clearly understood. The competencies required for working with families are less well defined within the family day care agency. There is limited professional training or experience (and sometimes limited interest or commitment) in working with parents and families. In addition, there is no consensus regarding the specific roles that coordinators are expected to assume in supporting families. There is also some anxiety regarding the direction that this movement towards family-centered child care might take in the future. These are important issues that need to be discussed as Early Childhood Professionals move towards family-centered practice.

The research that has been reviewed clearly focuses on the need to assist the staff in early childhood programs to explore their attitudes and values and philosophies with relationship to families. In the Family Resource Coalition's Best Practices Project, Mary Larner (1995) argues that this is a critical step in developing a family-centered approach to early childhood education:

> Carefully designing activities for parents is an important step toward family-supportive programming, but an even more critical element is attention to the characteristics, skills, and attitudes of the staff who interact with parents. As long as training focuses only on the child and the child's relations with the caregiver or teacher, the adults who work with families in early childhood programs cannot be expected to embrace a family-centered approach. (p. 30)

Within the family day care homes, there is confusion and ambiguity with regard to the status and role of the caregiver and parent. "Undercurrents of condescension and competition between early childhood staff and parents . . . will impede the development of family-supportive early childhood programs" (Larner, 1995, p. 11). Susan Kontos (1994) accurately describes the dilemmas that this can create.

> Professionals in child care settings are consistently faced with struggles to achieve professional status, with role ambiguities between mothers and caregivers, and with differences with parents in their childrearing preferences . . . in other words, the context of their employment setting may elicit negative attitudes from caregivers (p. 9)

This ambiguity is on both sides of the parent/staff equation. In the case of parents, the ability to provide family support is further complicated because there is a predisposition for guilt and self-doubt on the part of parents who realize the use of day care is inconsistent with the American [and Canadian] ideal of autonomous, self-sufficient family functioning (Kontos, 1984, p.10). Professional staff who interact with parents and caregivers may inadvertently reinforce this concept of independence which undermines the family support principle that all families need support at different stages in family life.

The logistics of family day care programs have created significant challenges regarding efforts to introduce family support. The heavy schedules of working and student parents with young children, the long working days for family day care providers, the often rushed conditions surrounding the transition times at drop-off and pick-up, the need for caregivers to manage responsibilities for their own families in addition to their child care function, caregiver turnover, the limited financial resources associated with child care in general (eg. staff compensation and program resources) all must be acknowledged in any program that is designed to enhance family support.

Professionals and families need to work together to discover ways that will assist early childhood programs such as family day care to become more family supportive. "We must seize opportunities and surmount difficulties if the next generation of programs is to combine the strengths of family support and the Early Childhood Education field" (Larner, 1995, p.4).

Chapter III

Goals and Objectives

It is clear that the introduction of family support principles and practices into a licensed family day care agency will be challenging. In the politically volatile late nineties, those working to develop linkages between family support and early childhood programs are 'breaking new ground' and have few proven models to guide them in their journey. The multiple interpretations of the concept, family support, combined with the confusion regarding the nature of the tri-partnership relationships between the agency's professional early childhood educators, caregivers and parents complicates the process of organizational renewal.

Staff have had limited preparation in their professional education to support them in their work with families. Existing in-service training has not focused on developing the competencies, attitudes and values to assist staff who are interacting with parents using family day care. The practicum agency's performance standard which requires child care coordinators to communicate on a monthly basis with families has proven ineffective. Although there is an increasing focus on prevention, the agency's historical deficit approach to families can be detected in current agency practices. When this is combined with a funding system that is based on an intrusive financial needs assessment, further obstacles are created that undermine the development of policies and practices that promote meaningful partnerships with parents. Overall, the agency's practices reflect a more traditional belief system and have not adopted a more ecological approach in its delivery of family day care.

Leaders who are working to infuse family support principles into traditional agencies are cautioned to avoid 'quick fixes' when embarking on a process of organizational change. The goals and objectives for the ten week practicum project are designed as 'first steps' in the formal introduction of family support in this family day care agency. The intention is to build a foundation within the agency to support future strategies that will further enhance the adoption of the principles and practices of family support.

Goal

The goal of this practicum project is to facilitate the process of moving the family day care agency towards a more family-centered approach in its work with families.

Objectives

Objective 1

To facilitate a process that supports the management team in developing a shared vision of family support for this family day care agency.

Expected Outcome: A draft position paper is expected to be completed by week 9 which specifically (1) describes the management's vision of the principles and values of family support (2) describes current practices that operationalized these concepts and (3) recommends a plan of action for strengthening family support in the agency.

This objective recommends that the Executive Director formally approve the document and that managers individually endorse its recommendations.

Objective 2

To provide an initial opportunity for child care coordinators to share their vision of family support for family day care.

Expected Outcome: 80% of the child care coordinators will participate in local staff meetings during week 10. The management team's position paper will be shared with these staff who will provide written feedback at the end of the meeting. A report that summarizes the coordinators' responses (including level of agreement and disagreement with the position paper's recommendations and staff ideas, questions and concerns regarding family support and its impact on the families they work with, on their own job responsibilities and the future work of the agency) will be produced for the management team.

Objective 3

To increase the understanding of family support principles and practices for staff who have expressed interest in providing leadership in family support to their agency colleagues.

Expected Outcomes: (1) A pilot in-service training course will be conducted for a representative group of coordinators, program trainers and managers.

(2) A pretest/ posttest trainee self-evaluation will produce an increased understanding of family support concepts as well as an increased commitment to provide leadership in family support within the agency.

Objective 4

To increase the family day care agency's resources for enhancing professional staff practices in family support.

Expected Outcome: A 'customized' family support training package will be produced for this family day care agency. The design and content will reflect participant feedback from the pilot in-service training program.

Chapter IV

Solution Strategy

The solution strategy that has been proposed for the practicum problem is presented in Chapter IV. This strategy was developed to reduce the confusion regarding the meaning and application of family support in this family day care agency. Current theories, approaches and training models that have been designed to introduce family support into human service and early childhood education programs are reviewed. Evaluation mechanisms that were developed to assess the outcomes of the practicum implementation strategy are also described.

Review of existing programs, models and approaches

Leaders in the family support movement have provided guidance regarding the transformation of organizations from a child-centered to a family-centered approach to service. Consistently, they have stressed the need for knowledgeable and committed leadership during a period of organizational change. Miller, Replogle and Weiss (1995) have referred to early childhood programs that have prematurely initiated family support services without an understanding or commitment to principles.

> Many service providers quickly translate family support into programmatic terms . . . without first grasping the theory behind the practice. Without a more intentional regard for the principles of family support, family support operations (including Board, staff, and consumer attitudes; and style of service delivery) will not be substantially improved (p.27).

When staff are positioned as 'change agents' and are expected to guide an organization's transition towards family-centered practice, they must be given ample opportunity to thoughtfully study what is involved in this service approach prior to actual implementation.

Weissbourd and Powell (1990) have suggested that the move from child-centered to family-centered child care must also include a review of "[agency] structures, decision-making process, program planning, staff qualifications, and staffing requirements" (p.2) to see if they are 'family friendly'. The practicum strategy that was developed included in-depth discussions regarding family support concepts followed by an organizational review of agency systems and procedures. The assumption was made that participants would be better prepared to evaluate their service delivery system once they had a basic understanding of family support concepts.

Sharon Kagan recognized that there are significant challenges associated with the work that has been undertaken by the practicum agency. "Nurturing quality, empowering families, and infusing family support principles into institutions is hard work" (p.19). She recommended that the following steps be included in this change process:

- chronicle and assess gains of the past
- vision broadly and creatively for the future, and
- convert that wisdom into realistic strategies that will permanently undergird family support (p.17).

From a content perspective, Kagan encouraged leaders in family support to maximize practice and policy effectiveness by

- defining and accessing quality services
- structuring the transition from a program to a systems orientation while maintaining quality

- building, sharing, and applying knowledge (p 18)

Kagan's thoughtful step-by step approach to organizational renewal is consistent with the theories of organizational change that were described in Chapter 2. In this project, sharing knowledge with those who have expertise in organizational change (particularly those who are familiar with the human service sector) would be beneficial. This type of collaboration and sharing of information across disciplines has been a key ingredient in the successful evolution of family support programs. As the visioning process occurred during the practicum implementation, organizational change theory combined with family support principles have been applied as "tool[s] of institutional reform, lever[s] to realign fundamental roles, processes, and relationships" (Kagan, p 19) in the movement towards family-centered child care.

The Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs also recognized the significance of using family support principles as a framework for organizational transformation:

> . . .the values or principles of family support, with their implications for how services should be delivered and how professionals should work, are increasingly being adopted as a guide to reform and revitalize more traditional social and human services. The principles provide a framework for moving from deficit and dependency-creating practices to more preventive, enabling approaches which foster competency and healthy interdependence (Kyle, 1994 p. 12).

In particular, Ontario Family Resource Programs have experienced a rapid expansion in the past fifteen years. They are guided by a holistic approach to families and describe themselves as "offering a range of community responsive programs which support, strengthen and empower families and caregivers in their caregiving roles." Although family day care differs in mission and mandate from Family Resource Programs, there are many similarities. "The range of support and educational components that are and can be offered by family day care agencies and family resource services is considerable and . . . they are variously addressed to meet the needs of providers, parents and children" (Kyle, 1992, p. 221). These include the focus on service to families with young children, their emphasis on supporting caregivers, the entry level training of staff and their belief in prevention. Both groups are also challenged by limited financial resources which is typically associated with community-based child and family programs. A number of family resource programs are located within the catchment area of the family day care agency. They have valuable experiences that will benefit early childhood educators who are working towards family-centered practice in child care. Collaborative efforts between the family resource programs and the family day care agency have the potential to enhance the services provided by both organizations.

Mary Larner encourages leaders who are promoting family-centered child care to consider strategies that will have as broad an impact as possible:

> If creating 'family-centered child care' is interpreted as merely adding parent-oriented services and sensitivity to selected child care programs that already embrace the goals of family support, then only a small proportion of the families who use child care will benefit (Larner, p. 28).

Larner suggests an additional strategy for increasing the potential support to families and those caring for young children. The author recommends that knowledgeable resource leaders be made available to provide support for parents, caregivers and organizations on a larger scale. In Linking Family Support and Early Childhood Programs: Issues, Experiences, Opportunities, she suggests that

> a wider audience can be reached if resource and referral agencies, family support programs, and community organizations [family day care agencies] conduct outreach to facilitate relationships between parents and all types of child care providers . . . [it] could make a few skilled coordinators available to a great many parents and child care providers - to offer training and consultation for child care providers, ombudsman and mediation services to both providers and parents where conflicts arise, and practical help for parents who must plan child care transitions. (p. 28)

The author's concept of maximizing the potential growth in family-centered practice by creating 'a few skilled coordinators' has potential application for this family day care agency which works with a large number of families and caregivers from diverse backgrounds across a large geographic area.

Family support training models

The following training programs provided resources that were utilized in the practicum solution strategy:

Parent Services Project

Parent Services Project (PSP) is an example of a mature program model that was initiated in 1981 and has grown to 300 centers serving 15,000 families. PSP effectively integrates family support services into Early Childhood Education programs and has operating principles that reflect a partnership between parents and staff. The significant contribution of PSP to the field of child care is its flexibility in design and responsiveness to the local community. "As no two families are alike, each PSP program is unique and the replication process cultivates a respect for that uniqueness . . . Services are determined by a combination of parent needs, organizational capacity and the establishment of linkages to community resources" (Lee and Seiderman, 1994, p.3). The PSP experience also recognizes that commitment from leadership is crucial:

> Agency leadership must be committed to extending the focus of their organization's work with families. This is essential because redirecting any child-centered agency to a family-centered approach implies a willingness to make shifts in how a program operates, the messages it sends to families and how it views itself" (p. 6).

In PSP, staff receive intensive training before working to implement family-centered programs in their local communities. The PSP training design is experiential and works to bridge principles and practice by "making the principles a little more concrete" (Phone conversation with Lisa Lee, PSP Coordinator). A "down to earth" practical training approach assists training participants to consider family support from a personal perspective and from the point of view of parents. For Early Childhood professionals, in particular, Lee suggests that it is important to stress that the well-being of children is closely tied to the well-being of their families. PSP uses family support principles as points of reference to assist trainees in working through the many challenging issues associated with operationalizing family support in early childhood programs (eg. sharing of authority).

PSP training recognizes that the change process will take time. Trainers use techniques such as brainstorming "the 10 small steps that our agency can take towards family-centered practice" to assist staff who are resistant to change or ambivalent about the movement to family-centered practice. They try to present change as a gradual process and support staff as they reflect on new ways of working with families. Focus groups are conducted after training to review participating agencies new application of family supportive policies and practices. These focus groups provide excellent feedback on training outcomes.

New Approaches to Family Support: The University Affiliated Program of Vermont

The family support movement in Vermont has developed training based on the assumption that effective change occurs when work is done within a system. A certificate program for facilitators of family support has been developed and is offered to multi-disciplinary staff from schools, agencies and organizations within adjacent communities. Susan Yuan, the coordinator of the program, describes the training program as "a work in progress." It was typical for the trainers who provided resources for this practicum project to suggest that they were refining materials on an ongoing basis and were anxious to get feedback regarding the tools that they had shared with me.

The training from the University Affiliated Program of Vermont produces an interagency core of workers who are committed to a common philosophy of family support. This program also uses experiential exercises and small group discussions to raise awareness of issues related to work with families. The teaching methods build on the life and work experience of participants. The curriculum is based on nationally identified family support quality indicators. The 45 hour curriculum contains six modules and includes:

- Philosophy of family support

- Cultural competence
- Strengths, needs, and supports
- Identifying and coordinating resources
- Working together with families
- Evaluating family support

The program uses a simple evaluation format to collect feedback from training participants: "Looking back over the different lessons, which class(es) do you consider the most important for yourself? Why? Do you intend to use any of the materials for your work? Which ones? Are there any areas that need to be included or given more emphasis?" (Yuan, 1996, p. 129). Originally, the training program utilized a lengthy structured self-evaluation (using a five point scale) that assessed student progress in each competency with a set of detailed questions. Although the participants rated the training positively, they criticized the evaluation process and reported that it was too time consuming and cumbersome.

Family Support Certificate Program: Edmonds College, Lynnwood, Washington

Edmonds Community College offers a two year certificate program in Family Support that includes courses in Empowering Families, Parent Education, Leadership in Family Support, Families and Environment and Building Partnerships: Art of Collaboration. Faculty members, Mary Ellen O'Keeffe and Louise Parker are in the process of developing and field testing a Family Support Practices Inventory (FSPI). These researchers have identified that students find the implementation of family support practices to be challenging. They point out that students sometimes "know intuitively what family support is but find it hard to explain what they do or how to explain it to others" (Workshop Presentation, Family Resource Coalition Conference, May, 1996, Chicago, IL). The FSPI inventory has excellent potential as a staff development instrument which will assist staff in reflecting on their current competencies in family support while identifying areas that require further development. When overall results of the FSPI are compiled, the tool also has the potential to pinpoint specific areas of strength and weakness within an agency.

Learning To Be Partners: An Introductory Training Program for Family Support Staff

At the time of writing, Learning to be Partners: An Introductory Training Program for Family Support Staff (Pooley, in press) is in the final stages of development. This training has been piloted by the Office of Child Development, University of Pittsburgh and is a collaborative effort with the Family Resource Coalition and the Center for Assessment and Policy Development. The training design also introduces family support theory through a wide range of interactive and experiential activities and avoids the use of lengthy lectures. During the pilot testing in the winter, 1996, each module was facilitated by a different resource leader from the community who had relevant experience for the selected module. Although multiple presenters enriched the experience for trainees, the training coordinator recommended that one trainer attend the entire course to ensure continuity for participants. Eleven separate modules are delivered over a seven day period. Many of the themes addressed in the training guide were directly applicable to the identified areas of interest for the practicum project and include:

1. Family Support Philosophy and Principles
2. Family Support Models and Practice
3. Appreciating Diversity

4. Relationship Building
5. Family Assessment
6. Family Goal Setting and Linking to Community Resources
7. Center-Based Programming
8. Support Groups
9. Home Visiting
10. Community Building
11. Team Building

This training guide has been prepared in response to practitioners across North America who have expressed the need for additional training resources in family support with this new publication. Combining this resource with those previously outlined in Chapter IV provides valuable training models that can be adapted for the practicum intervention.

In Toronto, Canada, Ryerson Polytechnic University is also introducing a new certificate program in family support in September, 1996. It is designed to address the specific needs of staff in Family Resource Programs. The course coordinator, June Pollard, has reported that program inquiries are received daily from across Canada. The interest that has been expressed in both of these new training initiatives demonstrates the need for new resources and services to support practitioners in their movement towards family supportive practice and underlines the timeliness of this practicum topic.

Description of solution strategy

The solution strategy was designed to assist the practicum agency in its movement towards a more family-centered approach in its delivery of family day care services. The solution strategy emphasized the development of a working knowledge of family support philosophies and principles, models and practices within two staff groups at the family day care agency. The first group was the agency's management team. The second group included representative child care coordinators and the agency's two program trainers. Kagan (1991), Miller, Replogle and Weiss (1995), Weissbourd and Powell (1990) and Larner (1995) emphasized the importance of developing an understanding of family support concepts and then applying them in the transition towards family-centered practice. The rationale for choosing this strategy was based on the review of literature, interviews and meetings with the staff of the family day care agency and a review of the available training materials from the training programs that have been outlined. Telephone interviews with trainers/educators at the Parents Services Project, University of Vermont, Edmonds Community College and a brief contact with staff at the University of Pittsburgh and the Family Resource Coalition also provided information that influenced the practicum design.

During the development of the practicum proposal, I documented past successes and agency "gains" (and strengths) as recommended by Kagan (1991) through a study of the organization's history and in staff interviews where staff specifically identified agency strengths. The practicum strategy was designed to actively involve the management team in a visioning process that would produce a draft position statement on the agency's role in family-centered practice. Based on Kagan's recommendations, they would brainstorm realistic strategies to increase the agency's emphasis on family-centered practice. The practicum strategy included meetings with all child care coordinators during the last week of the practicum project . The purpose was to begin a process that would encourage coordinators to become active participants in the discussions regarding the agency's role in family support. Initially, they were expected to provide constructive feedback regarding the work of the management team.

The second staff group were chosen to participate in a pilot in-service training program that was designed to enhance their understanding of family-centered practice. It was a requirement that participation must be voluntary in keeping with best practice in family support. It was expected that staff who were recommended for training would already have characteristics that demonstrated sensitivity to the needs of families in their case loads and have shown commitment to building optimal relationships with the families of the children in care. One significant criteria for participation was a commitment to full attendance with the exception of planned vacation schedules. During the planning of the practicum strategy, it became clear that the summer vacation schedule would create challenges! It was unlikely that any member, other than the practicum student, would have perfect attendance! As a facilitator, I planned to work to 'fill in the gaps' for staff who had vacations so that holiday breaks would not interfere significantly with the learning process.

Larner's proposal to "build a few skilled coordinators" provided insights that influenced the creation of the practicum solution strategy. Ideally, staff who participated in the practicum intervention would become energized in the change process and would actively commit to working towards some degree of change in the direction of family support. If the practicum strategy was successful, these "skilled coordinators" (managers and training participants) would act as family support "champions" who would communicate a clearly articulated vision of family support to their colleagues. Ultimately, the proposed solution strategy would provide professional development experiences that "increase[d] the directors' and supervisors' [and coordinators'] capacity to support and guide their staff in implementing more family supportive practices" (Larner, p.5). By working simultaneously with management in a visioning process and involving selected staff leaders in in-service training (with representatives from the management team actively participating in the training), I anticipated that there would be greater potential for the managers and program staff to develop a shared enthusiasm and commitment to this change process.

The selected design was expected to build on staff and agency strengths and ensure that training was delivered in a way that supported the empowerment of the participants. Consistent with the training models that have been presented, the practicum training was designed to be interactive and experiential. Training was expected to provide opportunities for staff to explore family support principles and practices while encouraging staff to explore their own belief systems, values and attitudes. Unless participants became empowered and energized in the change process and personally committed to a movement towards family-centered practice, the outcomes of the training interventions would have limited impact.

While reviewing possible solution strategies for the practicum problem, I discussed the option of traveling to California or Georgia to visit the Parents Services Project sites with the intention of piloting the program as a part of the practicum project. The philosophy of PSP's child care and family day care programs is similar to the philosophy of the practicum agency. PSP's experienced trainers and staff would have provided valuable support as new family supportive components were added to current child care service mix at this agency. Preliminary discussions were held with the staff of PSP and with the practicum agency's Executive Director. However, agency staff decided that it was premature to initiate a new program. Staff in the practicum agency needed time to explore their own vision of family support before embarking on a specific program thrust. Although the practicum agency was not introducing new programs during the practicum, I anticipated that the development of mentors or "champions" of family supportive practice would provide the foundation for future program enhancements.

Another solution strategy was also discussed. During the past year, the agency had a positive experience with a one day 'think-tank' that included all agency staff. An agency-wide 'think tank' with the theme of family support was considered as another alternative for a practicum project. The key difference was that this strategy would have involved the child care coordinators in the first stages of the visioning process and would have incorporated their experiences in the field. One manager cautioned that the 'downside' of the agency-wide event was that it had the potential to establish unrealistic expectations (or anxieties) regarding future change toward family-centered practice. An agency-wide meeting is still under consideration as a follow up to the practicum work. The summer practicum was designed to enhance managers' effectiveness in providing leadership in family support should a future agency-wide event take place.

A number of constraints impacted on the design of the solution strategy. The following factors were taken into consideration in the development of the practicum design. Meeting schedules were chosen in consultation with management staff who had provided direction regarding what was realistic and achievable given the following constraints. The requirements of the practicum project at Nova Southeastern University specified that the solution strategy must be conducted within a ten week time frame. This clearly limited the scope of the intervention. The training models that have been reviewed in this chapter were comprehensive and were designed for a training duration from three days (plus ongoing consultation) to courses lasting 15 weeks. This time commitment was unrealistic for managers and staff at the practicum agency who had ongoing responsibilities for delivering child care. Based on the realistic time constraints, the practicum training was clearly designed as an 'orientation' to family support rather than an in-depth course. In addition, this project was implemented between July and mid-September when absences due to staff vacations were unavoidable. Late August/early September was also a busy period for staff who are responsible for new child care placements and transfers. For this reason, a one week break was scheduled between week 7 and week 8 to allow staff to attend to these demands.

This solution strategy was designed to mark the beginning in the change process. The purpose was to build on the knowledge and commitment of staff participating in the practicum strategy so that they could offer leadership in enhancing the family support component of the agency work after the practicum . The solution strategy involved ongoing work by the practicum student with the following two agency work groups:

1. Management Team Work Group

The practicum design proposed a first staff group that was composed of the executive director, program director, six managers and senior administrative director. The strategy was designed to build on work that was initially undertaken during the practicum proposal stage. In my capacity as a practicum student in family support, I had conducted one to two hour interviews with each manager and discussed current agency practice relating to their work with families. In addition, I had presented a review of current research on family support to the management team and specifically focused on the challenges associated with linking family support to Early Childhood Programs based on the work of Larner, Kagan, Powell and Weissbourd. Managers had provided written suggestions for the practicum project. Their comments included:

- "Need to define how we want to/should work with families."
- "Raising our [management team] awareness of issues/complexities in family support is important/timely-keep us on track to make some decisions."
- "I expect to arrive at an agency value system that clearly defines what is parent support and how it operates at our agency."
- "Family support is an essential component to achieve success/quality in child care . . .must be endorsed . . .and communicated clearly by senior management - Develop!"

In a series of two full day and two half day workshops over the ten week practicum, I planned to facilitate a process that would assist the management staff in exploring the principles and practices of family support. From a "menu" of family support concepts provided by various family support programs, the management team would work to adopt those that were applicable to this agency and would create a draft position paper on family support within the agency. The strategy was also designed to involve the management team in an initial review of the current organizational practices and policies in order that they could discuss ways to make these practices more family supportive. Participants would be given an opportunity to share concerns regarding the challenges created by the proposed changes and explore solutions to anticipated problems. As a part of this process, the management team was expected to develop an action plan that outlined the preliminary steps that would be taken to strengthen the family support component of the agency.

During the final week of the practicum project, I planned to assist managers in sharing their draft position paper on family support with their individual staff groups. Child care coordinators would have a first opportunity to provide feedback on the work of the management group. Staff would also provide verbal and written feedback that identified their ideas, questions and concerns regarding the family support position paper and its impact on the families they work with, their own job responsibilities and the future work of the agency. The plan included the preparation of a final report that would summarize staff feedback. This report would be submitted to the Executive Director as a tool for future planning.

2. In-Service Training Course

A second initiative in the solution strategy was the piloting of an in-service training course in family support. The experiences from the pilot would be used to develop a training package that would be implemented in the future. This strategy was based on the literature which stressed the need to build, share and apply the theories of family support within an organization. Six training were planned between June 30 and September 15, 1996 for a duration of three hours per session. Although it was unrealistic to expect that family support competencies would be fully developed within this timeframe, the training was designed to establish the basic concepts of family support and explore their potential application within the agency setting. The plan was to include content that would focus on the critical differences between family and child-centered approaches as well as traditional human service practices and family support practices. This agency has done extensive work on cultural competence in the past year so content in this area would be limited. Interagency collaboration and coordination, evaluation and advocacy were only included in brief presentations. These topics will require additional emphasis after the practicum project is completed.

This practicum strategy is designed to included approximately 20% (six staff) of the child care coordinators. These coordinators would be chosen to represent different geographic regions serviced by the agency. The staff who were targeted were already active participants in local staff meetings, attend bimonthly agency meetings and often support the program trainers in their work with caregivers. They also participate in the informal support and problem solving sessions that occur regularly between coordinators who work with parents and caregivers. They have the capacity to act as 'champions' to influence service delivery within their own regions. The agency's two program trainers were also included as potential participants. Their participation was particularly significant given the respect they hold with colleagues across the agency, their expertise in training and their ongoing contact with caregivers in agency training events. The plan also included participation by two family day care managers who were expected to share insights, resources and information with the management team that is working simultaneously to develop a vision of family support. A manager from the center-based programs had asked to join the training so that the experience could be adapted for child care center staff at a later date. The Executive Director and Program Director had the option of participating based on their priorities and schedules.

Evaluation schedule

(a) Pretest Post-test Evaluation: All agency staff who participated in the practicum project were expected to complete a pretest evaluation at the beginning of the first session in Week 1. At the end of Week 10, all participants would complete the same instrument to identify the changes that has occurred over the ten week practicum. The tool was designed to assess the staff's interest/commitment in giving agency leadership to a shift from child-centered to family-centered practice.

(b) Management Work Group evaluation: At the end of each of the four sessions, a simple "How are we doing?" written evaluation would be circulated. Open-ended and closed questions were designed to receive feedback on the group's progress with requests for input regarding the content of remaining sessions.

(c) In-service Training participant evaluation: At the end of each of the six sessions, each participant would be asked to provide written feedback regarding the clarity of the information introduced, the exercises that they liked and disliked, the relevance to their work and possible applications for training in the larger agency context. They would be asked to include any new ideas that could be implemented to move the agency towards more family-centered practice.

(d) Family Support Practices Inventory (FSPI): Permission had been received to use the FSPI. It will be provided as a self-assessment tool for participants in each group in their first sessions respectively. The results would be submitted to the authors and possibly be included in their current work to refine this tool. The tool would be used to introduce discussions on family support practice.

(e) Management presentations to regional staff groups: Presentations in week 10 would be designed to encourage staff discussion regarding the position paper and its implications for each staff member and the families with whom they work. Child care coordinators would have the opportunity to provide written responses regarding their questions, comments, concerns and expectations for agency movement towards enhanced family-centered practice.

Calendar plan for implementation activities

The practicum implementation calendar was developed in consultation with the management staff. Activities were scheduled to ensure maximum availability of participants. Table 2 presents the 10 week practicum schedule and highlights the two staff groups which include the Management Work Group and the In-Service Staff Training Group.

Table 2: **Calendar of Events for Practicum Project**

	Management Work Group	In-service Training
Week 1	Full Day Meeting	X
Week 2		X
Week 3		X
Week 4	Half Day Meeting	
Week 5		X
Week 6	Full Day Meeting	
Week 7		X
Week 8	Half day meeting	
Week 9		X
Week 10	Management Presentations to child care coordinators at regional meetings	

Chapter V

Strategy Employed - Action Taken and Results

Chapter V describes the practicum implementation phase and highlights some of the essential components of the practicum process. A brief synopsis of the topics that were discussed throughout the the 10 week practicum implementation period has been included for reference in Appendix A. The specific outcomes of the practicum implementation are presented in relationship to the stated goals and objectives and include a summary of the participant pretest/ posttest evaluations. This chapter will describe how the practicum intervention effectively increased participants' understanding of specific family support concepts while building a foundation to support future strategies to enhance family-centered practice.

Description of the Implementation Phase

The goal of the practicum was to facilitate the process of moving the family day care agency towards a more family-centered approach in its work with families. The solution strategy involved intensive work on a short-term basis with two agency staff groups. As a practicum student, I attempted to promote and practice the principles of family support throughout the delivery of the practicum intervention. I was anxious that decisions regarding the movement to family-centered practice would be determined by practicum participants. "For the process to be empowering, [I] needed to [practice] skills related to facilitating communication among people, skills like listening, building trust, group dynamics, to name a few" (Whitmore, 1991, p. 7). In order to accomplish this goal, the content of sessions was adjusted on an ongoing basis to reflect the expressed needs and interests of participants.

The practicum process was considered to be as important as the specific outcomes. "It's the 'how' - the process - that counts. The process, how one goes about conducting an investigation or developing policy, is a definitive component of the product" (Whitmore, p. 1). One participant in the training group recognized the importance of process. She encouraged a colleague to "Appreciate the Process" even though the translation of family support theory into an early childhood setting was not an easy task. This became the theme of the in-service training course.

In Ontario, Canada, family day care involves a tri-partnership which includes the licensed family day care agency, the caregiver and the family. Although it was understood that significant family support occurred between the caregiver and family, this project focused specifically on two partners. It was designed to address the ways that the family day care agency could reflect more family-centered practice with the families using home child care. One manager suggested that a clearly articulated vision of family support would provide staff with new insights that could be applied to their work with all families. Another senior manager described a longer term outcome for this work. "We need to be more supportive of all families: families receiving child care, caregivers' families and the agency staff group and their families as well as families in our communities." Staff recognized that these 'first steps' have the potential to influence the organization's way of viewing relationships across a broad spectrum. In the brief practicum period of 10 weeks, however, participants disciplined themselves to focus specifically on 'one piece of the partnership pie'.

1. Management Team Work Group

The executive director, program director and six managers participated in four management workshops. Four managers are fully responsible for the delivery of the agency's family day care program. Two managers oversee the delivery of the agency's group child care programs and participated to assess the feasibility of enhancing the family-centered component of the agency's 21 child care programs. The agency's senior administrator also participated in the first (orientation) and fourth (wrapup) workshop. The first three sessions were six hours in duration while the final session was three hours. (The second session was extended from the planned three hours to six hours at the request of managers.)

Given the nature and content of the workshops and the reflective process that was required, a 'retreat setting' at the home of the executive director was chosen for three of the four sessions. Managers spent reasonably undisturbed time focusing on family-centered child care. Prior to the beginning of each session, managers casually discussed a range of operational concerns and seemed preoccupied with work assignments that were unrelated to the practicum project. This included a pending contract that would add four new centers to their agency during 'week 9' of the practicum project. Although the participants initially appeared concerned with work related and personal issues, they quickly became engaged in discussions on family-centered child care and became animated as they refocused their attention in each session.

Highlights of management work group sessions

At the beginning of the first session, I surveyed staff and calculated the total number of years that staff had worked with children and families. Participants recorded 245 years of experience! Given their wealth of experience, I pointed out that these sessions could be better described as a 'shared learning experience' rather than 'training' which seemed more consistent with the principles of family support. Next, the visual illustration of a wind chime was used to depict the relationships between family members and to initiate a discussion on family-centered child care. The child is one member of a family (represented by one chime) and may receive quality child care. However, as the agency moves to become more family-centered practice, we hope to support and strengthen the family so that 'they can make beautiful music together'!

As an icebreaker, managers were involved in an experience that focused on values of their families of origin as well as their current families (Yuan, p.63). Managers had an opportunity to explore the impact of personal experiences and professional training on their own work with families. They discussed the need to provide opportunities for staff to reflect on their own values and attitudes as they embarked on new ways of working with families.

The video, 'Our Families Our Future', was used to introduce family support program models and practices to the training group. Managers were familiar with early childhood programs, they had limited experience with family support. Although this Canadian urban community is culturally different from the communities portrayed in the video, the managers reported that concrete illustrations of family support programs were helpful and provided "a good jumping off point for more detailed discussions." The video acted as a catalyst for discussions regarding the staff's perspectives regarding family support. Some managers described family support as a specific program while others interpreted family support as a philosophy and approach. Participants continued to refer to segments of the video throughout the practicum and suggested that it be used in the 'week 10' orientation for coordinators.

The exercise, "New Approaches to Practice" (Pooley, in press) built on the insights generated from the video. This exercise highlighted some of the significant changes that have occurred as human service programs moved from a traditional counseling to a family supportive approach to working with families. The Family Support Practices Inventory was also administered (O'Keeffe and Parker) and results were forwarded to the researchers for inclusion in the test sample. Although tools to critique the results were not available, the FSPI was used to highlight the range of competencies that are basic to family support work.

After managers had explored the concepts of family support, they discussed the terminology that would be used to describe the way the agency works with families. Managers were concerned that the term, 'family support,' was problematic in Ontario, Canada because of its association with the provincial Family Support Plan. This plan, which is designed to collect and distribute court-ordered child support payments, has been described in the media as a collection tool to ensure that 'deadbeat parents' live up to their parental obligations. In addition, 'family support' has also been synonymous with 'counseling' in traditional early childhood education curriculum in local colleges and this interpretation had been adopted by this agency in the past. Managers decided to use 'family-centered' in their work and suggested that this term presented a more 'positive' approach within the Ontario context.

In workshop session 2, concepts relating to family support were reviewed in greater depth. Managers then proceeded to analyze the family day care agency's operation in the context of family-centered practice. In the exercise, 'Recognizing the Driving Forces of Services' (provided by Parents Services Project), managers reviewed existing organizational policies and practices to determine whether the needs of the system (ie. agency), the child or the family were being addressed. Initially, managers rated policy statements describing a fictitious human services program and explored the rationale for the each statement. This exercise was non-threatening and was effective in 'setting the stage' for managers to participate in a review of the family day care agency's policies and practices. Managers worked to identify the underlying 'driving forces' of current and proposed policies and practices. One manager remarked that "a first step in moving to family-centered child care is an internal 'housecleaning'. This chance for personal and professional reflection is important before we move on to restructure to make it possible."

During the discussions that took place, it became apparent that there were a variety of policies and practices across regions and that all managers did not have a full grasp of the 'bigger picture'. This agency had experienced rapid growth and organizational change over the past five years as 21 child care centers were introduced to the service mix and the geographic boundaries were expanded. Instead of working from one home office where personal contact occurred on a daily basis, a number of suburban offices had been established to better serve outlying regions. Policies and practices had been adapted across regions to reflect different contractual and funding arrangements. Each manager had the opportunity to describe key practices that impacted on their work with families in their own communities. This allowed the management team to clarify policies and practices that were similar and dissimilar and to discuss the reasons for variations. It highlighted issues that that required further attention. Essentially, this review assisted "the team [in becoming] more aware of what [was] happening [locally], more perceptive of potential outcomes, more critical of not only the project itself, but also of the complexity of the issues with which it is involved" (van der Eyken, Willem, 1991, p. 8). Creating a common understanding of the overall service delivery system was essential prior to the development of a position paper on family-centered child care.

In the third management session, the significant challenge associated with developing a partnership relationship with families was discussed at length. Often, the contact between agency staff and the family is a monthly telephone call. The workshop participants considered that

> the heart of family support practice is the relationship between program staff and families. This relationship engages families as partners and helps them to develop their own capacities. Rather than valuing solely the end result of our work, we value the chance to form strengthening relationships with families along the way (Pooley, in press).

Specific practices were identified that supported this partnership and were included in the text of the discussion paper (Appendix B). Selected practices that were discussed in the context of a movement towards enhanced family-centered practice have been described in Appendix C. Managers also emphasized the need to recognize coordinators who provide ongoing support for the many families who indicate a need or interest.

Position paper on family-centered practice

Managers focused their attention on the development of the draft position paper on family-centered child care in Workshop 3 and 4. They decided that the key "reading audience" for this discussion paper was the professional staff at the agency. The original intention of the practicum intervention was to reduce confusion regarding the meaning of family support by articulating the vision of family support to agency staff. In its initial form, managers reiterated their interest in focusing on the agency/family relationship in the position paper. At a later time, revisions would be made so that the document would include the significant relationship of the caregiver within the tri-partnership and would also communicate the agency's commitment to family-centered child care to a larger audience.

After briefly debating possible approaches for producing an agency position paper, managers quickly came to a consensus "that they would not reinvent the wheel when some of the resource material said what they believed." Managers recognized that they had limited time for this project and were pleased with the extensive resources that were provided by the practicum workshops. Throughout the practicum implementation, managers were exposed to a significant range of resources in the form of formal presentations, handouts, the video Our Families Our Future, and reading assignments. They selected two specific resources as models for their work. The first resource was entitled "Creating Family-Centered Child Care" (from the Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Child Care) and was located in ERIC/EECE Newsletter (1996, p. 3). The second selected resource was was 'Moving Towards Family-Centered Child Care: A Guide for Translating Principles into Program Policy and Practice' (courtesy of Parents Services Project). The substance of the discussion paper is similar to the content of the two original resource papers. However, managers methodically studied, reworked (when necessary) and then adopted each statement to reflect the values, principles and practices of this family day care agency. The paper was developed in a format that presented the guiding principles for family-centered care and then proceeded to describe ways that the agency endeavored to reflect these family-centered child care principles in its policies and practices. (Appendix

B presents a revised draft discussion paper which is entitled 'Moving Toward Family Centered Child Care'.)

The managers utilized the training group to critique the draft position paper prior to its release across the organization. While one coordinator was reviewing the first draft, she immediately suggested a new strategy that would enhance one of the practices in the paper. It was exciting to observe this interaction which showed synergy in action! This paper, which was initially created by the management work group, acted as a catalyst for additional suggestions for family-centered practice from the training group members.

The managers were clear that the 'next step' was a thorough discussion of the draft position paper by all coordinators. In week 10 of the practicum implementation, the draft discussion paper was circulated to family day care coordinators throughout the agency. Coordinators were asked to study the paper and to provide their input on family-centered child care while also describing the support that they would require to make this initiative a reality. After the consultation process is completed and coordinators have made recommendations regarding the movement towards family-centered practice, managers will proceed to develop a more comprehensive action plan.

2. In-Service Training Course

A pilot in-service training course in family support was completed by two managers (who also participated in the management workshops), seven child care coordinators (representing 22 % of the agency's coordinators) and one program resource trainer. The small group size was ideal and allowed for maximum participation in discussions. Sessions were three hours in duration and were held at agency offices. Training sessions included hands-on experiences, the video Our Families Our Futures, mini-lectures, small group discussions as well as animated debates. Brief 'homework assignments' included readings that built on the concepts presented in the training sessions. A 'makeup' session to update staff who had missed a session was also held prior to Session 5.

It is extremely important that an organization clearly communicate the purpose of a pilot training to those who have not had an opportunity to participate. This practicum design was developed to test training materials and approaches prior to their use with the entire staff. Due to time constraints and vacation schedules, the selection process for training participants was poorly communicated and could have been improved. 'Informal sources' reported that some coordinators (who were not involved) felt that the trainees were an exclusive group with a 'hidden agenda'. This image of 'the chosen few' runs counter to the principle of empowerment that was being promoted in the practicum and had the potential of alienating staff who were initially excluded from the process. To counteract the confusion, I emphasized repeatedly the need for participants to personally update their colleagues on our progress, to share the resource materials and to explore issues that were discussed in the sessions and solicit feedback.

The training design which included managers and coordinators working together created challenges and opportunities. On a positive note, the inclusion of two managers in both groups ensured ongoing linkages and communication and enhanced learning across two levels of the organization. In the second training session, managers built the first linkage between groups by sharing their learning from the 'values exercise' in their previous workshop. Managers also presented issues that had been raised in the training group with their colleagues. Participants reported that managers and coordinators struggled together to apply theory to their daily practice between training sessions.

Some coordinators confided that they were hesitant to express their opinions openly while supervisory staff were present at the training sessions. Past experiences and their perceptions of organizational roles and communication patterns seemed to influence their level of involvement at the beginning of the practicum training. The coordinators anxiety was heightened as they realized that practicum outcomes had the potential to significantly impact their own job responsibilities.

> Participation in decisions affecting one's welfare is not the end result of some mystical personal transformation. Rather, there is a complex relation between participation, institutional relationships, and personal transformation. Participation affects institutional arrangements and enhances personal self-esteem; in turn, more encouraging institutions and enhanced self-esteem will result in increased participation (Whitmore, p. 3).

Every participant became an active player in animated discussions as the sessions progressed and the initial hesitancy seemed to become less of an issue. The weekly feedback sheets repeatedly highlighted the value of the group discussions. One participant reported that "the most effective element of today's workshop was the dialogue among coworkers and the workshop facilitator -- very beneficial."

Highlights of training sessions

The key topics that were discussed in each of the training sessions are presented in Appendix A. During the first three training sessions (nine hours in total), the primary emphasis was on the introduction of family support theory and practice. As a facilitator, I attempted to provide an orientation to family support for all participants so that ensuing discussions would be based on a shared understanding of family support concepts and terminology. The intention was to build a 'solid foundation' so that later discussions would be more meaningful and group discussions would focus on the substantive issues relating to the enhancement of family-centered child care rather than on clarification of concepts. The remaining nine hours in the training group continued to include presentations on family support theory. However, the participants took ownership of the process and considered how to apply the training concepts in their work. The challenge for the facilitator was to balance thoughtful discussions with additional theoretical training!

Once again, I surveyed participants at the first session and calculated that staff had over 230 years of collective work experience with children and their families. The purpose of this exercise was to establish an interactive learning environment that identified each participant as a resource. The first training exercises, family diagrams and family maps, assisted staff in reflecting on the source of personal attitudes, values and beliefs. These exercises, which are presented in Working With Families "bring to light the many factors that have had an impact on their own family, and will assist [students] in identifying the range of factors that have influenced [their] concept of family" (Shimoni and Baxter, 1996, p. 25). Staff enthusiasm was infectious as they returned for the second training session with detailed family maps that had been requested as 'homework assignments.' (A number of staff had literally spent hours creating collages of their family histories!) The design that allowed staff to focus on their own experience and definition of family in the early part of training was important. One participant included the following comment in the weekly feedback form: "This exercise was concrete and valuable to me. It helped me to personally connect my life to family support ideas."

Once again, the video, Our Families Our Futures effectively introduced family support program models and practices to the participants who already had an extensive background in early childhood education. A thoughtful discussion on the principles and assumptions of family support programs took place. The video provided the impetus for staff to discuss ways to build linkages between family support and early childhood programs. These participants also continued to refer to segments of the video throughout the training program.

As family systems theory and the ecological approach in family support were introduced, the complexities in working with families became more apparent. The ensuing discussions underlined reasons why the role of the family day care coordinator was challenging, stimulating, surprising, exciting and sometimes overwhelming. The discussions also revealed the complexity and importance of their role in the tri-partnership within the family day care agency. Participants discussed the interrelationship that exists between the values and beliefs of the coordinator (including her definition and experience of family), the family using child care and the caregiver and her family.

The 'Categorization Exercise' in Learning to Be Partners received excellent participant feedback as a tool for assisting staff in looking at the relationship between judgmental attitudes and assessment. This exercise emphasized that

> We need to be continually aware of how we categorize others and ourselves. When we place people in categories, we begin to move away from the essence of our practice: approaching families as unique and not generalizing their needs and characteristics. Family support work . . . requires us to learn about each other

> because we are unique individuals, not a part of some homogeneous group of others (Pooley, in press).

The participants discussed their concerns regarding the stereotypes that are sometimes shared among colleagues (eg. towards single parents, parents receiving fee assistance, middle income families) and the negative impact that this has on service. One training participant commented in Session 3 that "there was not going to be a huge shift in the way she actually did her job . . .it was more of a change in attitudes that was going to occur."

By the third training session, participants were instrumental in presenting case studies from their previous week's work with families. They continued to apply the principles of family support to 'real life' scenarios. These efforts demonstrated a genuine commitment to build linkages between family-centered theory and practice in the family day care program. In addition, training participants' were observed applying their 'new insights' between sessions such as one trainee who was overheard suggesting to colleagues that they should avoid stereotyping single parents. "Just because you're single doesn't mean that you may not be coping!" This was a perfect example that champions were already at work at the mid-point of the practicum!

Staff discussed ways to move beyond a child-centered to a family-centered approach in their work. In addition, concepts that focused on family strengths (rather than deficits), supporting families in identifying their needs and aspirations, mobilizing family resources, and building linkages to informal and formal supports were also introduced. The characteristics of the effective help-giver were also discussed. The training materials were adapted from Developing Individualized Family Support Plans: A Training Manual

(Bennett, Lingerfelt, Nelson, 1990) and was based on the work of Dunst, Trivette and Deal in Enabling and Empowering Families: Principles and Guidelines for Practice (1988).

By the fourth week, one staff reported that she "saw things from a different perspective. I realize that I am already doing a lot of this but am more aware and trying to do it with all families." As a homework assignment in the later part of training, staff were encouraged to submit a written description of their work with one family which reflected the family supportive practice. This was another effective method for encouraging staff to translate the training concepts into their daily work. Appendix D illustrates one case study that was submitted after 12 hours of training. Although there are aspects of the case study that may require further reflection (eg. "the coordinator set up a pre-placement with the caregiver she felt was best suited to met this family's needs" presents the approach of matching as opposed to family choice), the 'success story' also focuses on family-defined needs and aspirations as well as the value of formal and informal support. These topics were presented in the previous training session. In one way, this training process seemed to reassure staff that they were already actively involved in supporting families. At the same time, staff also expressed concern about the challenges associated with applying family support theory in the context of a family day care setting. I continually reminded participants that our work was a first 'small step' in a two to three year process that would move the agency in the direction of more family-centered practice. The following excerpt from my voice mail illustrates the level of intensity which participants explored the issues of family-centered child care throughout the training:

> Today was the deadline for getting suggestions to you for small steps that we can take in terms of family support. I've been thinking about this a lot and I'm

> having difficulty in coming up with a few small ideas. I've been quite impressed with the whole concept of family support and I think we are already practicing a lot or some of the ideas of it. I was thinking about it when I was driving back in the car from holidays. The basic underlying philosophy of treating people with respect, not trying to engineer the help we provide but being attentive to what they need and want is so important and basic. Many of us in the helping professions often loose sight of these basic concepts. I'm not sure how to put it all in place . . .I need to do a little more thinking."

Training session five and six included a thorough critique of the draft position paper on family-centered child care that had been prepared by the management team. In order to test the 'integrity' of the paper, training participants brainstormed examples of family-centered practice to accompany each statement. At the end of session 6, the coordinators took a very active role in discussing how to communicate the position paper to their colleagues. They were anxious to bring colleagues 'on board' in a respectful way.

Results of the strategy that was employed

A pretest evaluation was administered to the management work group and pilot training group at the beginning of their first practicum sessions. (The two managers who attended both groups only completed the pretest evaluation once.) A posttest evaluation was completed at the end of the last session for each group. Participants coded each submission to allow me to compare individual responses as well as the group mean scores. Open-ended questions were developed for each group and were included in the administration of the posttest. The pretest/ posttest evaluation forms are included in Appendix E. All participants completed a written feedback form entitled 'Exploring

Family Support' at the end of each session. The weekly feedback form is included in Appendix F.

The results of the practicum implementation will be presented in relation to the practicum objectives that have been described in Chapter III.

Increasing management understanding of family support concepts as a basis for developing the future vision of family support

Objective 1 stated that a process would be facilitated to support the management team in developing a shared vision of family support for this agency. It was the intention of the practicum to increase management's familiarity with family support concepts in order to allow them to consider their application in a movement towards greater family-centered practice. The assumption is that their decisions would be better grounded based on sound understanding of these concepts. Questions were designed to solicit participant feedback regarding their comprehension of five fundamental family support concepts at the beginning of the practicum implementation and after the intervention took place. These included "partnerships between parents and professionals, family-centered service, positive strengths-based approach to families, an ecological approach to families and interdependence."

The preliminary focus in the management work group (i.e. increasing knowledge) was designed to enhance the management team's ability to develop and assume ownership of a position paper on family-centered practice. Responses were tabulated for eight participants who had attended three of the four sessions. (One participant only attended one full day workshop and the final three hour session. Given the limited contact hours, her response was excluded from the calculations.) In two categories, the response was

Table 5.1 **Management Mean Response to Pretest/ Posttest Evaluation**

	pretest	posttest
1. Partnership between parents and professionals		
* my understanding of this concept	3.5	4.25
* relevance of concept to my work	4.75	4.75
* intention to use this knowledge in my work	4.88	4.88
2. Family-centered service		
* my understanding of the concept	3.0	4.25
* relevance of concept to my work	4.75	4.5
* intention to use this knowledge in my work	4.88	4.63
3. Positive, strengths-based approach to families		
* my understanding of this concept	3.38	4.38
* the relevance of this concept to my work	4.5	4.38
* the intention to use this knowledge in my work	4.75	4.38
4. An ecological approach to families		
* my understanding of this concept	2.5	4.25
* the relevance to this concept to my work	3.75	4.25
* the intention to use this knowledge in my work	4.25	4.38
5. Interdependence		
* my understanding of this concept	. 88	3.5
* relevance of this concept to my work (n=7)	3.7	3.7
* intention to use this knowledge in my work (n=7)	4.14	3.85

reduced to n = 7 to reflect an unmarked response by one participant. Table 5.1 presents the management's mean response to the pretest/posttest evaluation.

These results demonstrated an increased understanding in all five family support concepts. This result was reinforced with responses to Question 10: "I feel that I can describe family support to other staff in our agency". The responses showed one of the most significant positive changes from 3.38 to 4.13. The most significant gain was in the understanding of the "ecological approach to families." Given that the ecological approach in working with families is fundamental in the family support field, this enhanced appreciation is important as the agency moves in the direction of family-centered practice.

As a practicum student, I had selected the specific concepts that I believed were relevant to this family day care agency's movement towards family-centered practice. All categories other than 'interdependence' received ratings over 4.25 with reference to relevancy. A review of the content of the management workshops confirmed that the specific term 'interdependence' was only used on a couple of occasions. In future sessions, I would recommend a more thorough presentation on the meaning of interdependence. The degree of emphasis on specific family support concepts seemed to positively correlate with the management team's posttest responses.

Managers were asked to report on whether or not they intended to apply the concepts and approaches that were discussed throughout the practicum experience. In two cases, 'partnerships and an ecological approach', participants had either the same or increased intention to use the family support concepts in their work. Although the other categories had slight declines, scores of 3.85 and higher indicate an ongoing commitment by managers to use the concepts in their work. Post-practicum site visits and interviews will be required to determine if the application actually took place

Managers' responses to a movement towards family-centered practice

The management group was asked to provide feedback on the potential movement towards a more family-centered approach in its work with families. The questions were designed to assess their individual views regarding the importance of making this transition (question 6). This information was important given that this group represented the organizational leaders who would ultimately manage the change process.

Table 5.2

Managers' Feedback Regarding a Move to Greater Family-Centered Practice

	pretest	posttest
* In my opinion, the importance of making this transition from child-centered to family-centered practice	4.63	4.25
* At this time, my interest in changing the way our agency works with families	4.75	4.75
* My commitment to provide leadership to my colleagues in family support	4.88	4.75
* My enthusiasm for introducing family support into the agency's practices	4.75	4.75

Although the sample size is small (n=8), it is interesting to note that there was a slight decline in the reported "importance of making the transition to family-centered child care." Two of the four participants who lowered their ratings (pretest 4.6 to posttest 3.3) were those who participated in both the management and training groups. In contrast, those who only participated in the management group had pretest scores of 4.6 and posttest scores of 4.8. Although it is impossible to accurately interpret the meaning of these scores, one observation can be made. During the training sessions, in depth discussions took place between the two managers and seven coordinators and focused on significant challenges, issues and concerns related to this initiative. When one combines the significant management responsibilities with the range of unresolved issues and concerns related to this change, these managers reported reduction in their rating of this move towards family-centered practice. However, the rating above 3.0 indicates that the subgroup of managers who participated in training continue to recognize the importance of this transition.

Overall posttest scores indicate a continued high level of interest (4.75), commitment (4.75) and enthusiasm (4.75) that is essential to the future success of the practicum goal. The evaluation instrument may not accurately represent the actual movement in this category due to a ceiling effect created by both high pretest and posttest scores. Question 12 asked managers to report on projects that they wanted to consider as result of their practicum involvement. Six managers specifically focused on staff development including "the introduction of concepts to all staff so we can all work towards family-centered child care," "delivery of information to staff as soon as possible to increase awareness and effect change for the better in relationships with parents," and "really help staff reflect on how their behaviours and actions support (or not support) families." In addition, managers identified the need to "solicit meaningful feedback from families regarding their experiences with the service and the agency's responsiveness to their needs" as well as "develop mechanisms to formally express appreciation for family contributions within the child care programs" and "enhance the parenting resources (eg.

books and videos) in the agency." Two managers also identified the need to address the monthly communication standard between families and coordinators.

Consultation with child care coordinators

Objective 2 focused on the opportunity for child care coordinators to share their vision of family support for family day care. 90% of the coordinators participated in a brief presentation at the end of the practicum implementation. The history of the development of the paper was described including an overview of the practicum project. The draft position paper was distributed to staff who were encouraged to review the statements and discuss them with their colleagues (including their peers who attended the in-service training sessions) and managers. Given the time of year (early September when intake was particularly hectic), an in-depth consultation meeting was delayed to the following month. Although a preliminary presentation took place and the discussion paper was circulated to all staff, thorough discussion with feedback did not occur until after the practicum implementation period. For this reason, the expected outcome for Objective 2 was only partially completed within the timeframe of the practicum plan. The need to balance the demands associated with the delivery of high quality child care with the commitment to improve the service for children and their families is an ongoing struggle.

Increasing training participants understanding of family support concepts

Objective 3 for the practicum implementation was designed to increase the understanding of family support principles and practices for staff who have expressed interest in providing leadership in family support to their agency colleagues. As reported, the pilot in-service training course was conducted for two managers, seven coordinators and one program resource trainer. This included 50% of the family day care managers and

22% of the agency's family day care coordinators. The pretest/ posttest was also administered to the participants in the pilot in-service training program. Responses were tabulated for eight participants including the coordinators and program resource consultant who had completed a minimum of three training sessions. Managers' responses were included in the previous calculations. Table 5.3 presents the mean score for the training participant responses.

Once again, in every category, results demonstrated 'an increased understanding' in the family support concepts that were presented. All pretest scores in this category were on or below 3.25 and all scores equaled or exceeded a mean of 4.0 in the posttest. The practicum intervention achieved the first outcome for Objective 3 by demonstrating that "a pretest/ posttest trainee self-evaluation produced an increase in understanding of family support concepts." The lowest ranked statement in the pretest in the participants' level of understanding was the "ecological approach"(1.88). This category also produced the most significant improvement with a posttest score of 4.00.

All the family support concepts were identified as relevant to the staff's work in the family day care agency and showed positive growth in perceived relevancy in the posttest rating. The categories 'partnerships between parents and professionals' and 'positive strengths-based approach to families' received ratings above 4.0 in the pretest and posttest. Based on their feedback, these concepts will be included in the training resources that are developed as an outcome of the practicum pilot in-service training.

All statements with the exception of family-centered service (which had a minor decline from 4.38 to 4.13) also reported an increase in the participants' intention to use the family support concepts in their work. Based on the combined results from the training

Table 5.3 Training Participants Mean Response to Pretest/ Posttest Evaluation

	pretest	posttest
1. Partnership between parents and professionals:		
* my understanding of this concept	3.25	4.38
* relevance of this concept to my work	4.38	4.5
* intention to use this knowledge in my work	4.5	4.5
2. Family-centered service:		
* my understanding of this concept	3.0	4.25
* relevance of concept to my work	3.88	4.25
* intention to use this knowledge in my work	4.38	4.13
3. Positive, strengths-based approach to families:		
* my understanding of this concept	3.13	4.25
* the relevance of this concept to my work	4.13	4.25
* the intention to use this knowledge in my work	4.25	4.38
4. An ecological approach to families:		
* my understanding of this concept	1.88	4.00
* the relevance of this concept to my work	3.00	4.13
* the intention to use this knowledge in my work	3.38	4.13
5. Interdependence:		
* my understanding of this concept	2.75	4.13
* the relevance of this concept to my work	3.38	4.13
* my intention to use this knowledge in my work	3.88	4.13

group and management team, one can conclude that the participants have the intention of applying the knowledge in their own jobs. This has significant implications for the professional practice at this family day care agency. Respondents from both groups represent 25 % of the agency's professional staff who have direct operational responsibility for the family day care programs at a field or supervisory management level.

Commitment to champion family support with colleagues

Table 5.4 highlights staff responses to questions which solicit their feedback regarding the level of importance for making a transition towards more family-centered service. They were also asked to rate their personal interest and enthusiasm and commitment to provide leadership to colleagues in family support.

Table 5.4 Trainees Feedback Regarding the Movement to Family-Centered Practice

	pretest	posttest
* In my opinion, the importance of making this transition from child-centered to family-centered	3.75	4.13
* At this time, my interest in changing the way our agency works with families	3.75	4.38
* My commitment to provide leadership to my colleagues in family support	3.88	3.88
* My enthusiasm for introducing family support into the agency's practices	4.25	4.25
* I feel that I can describe family support to other staff in our agency	3.38	3.75

The training participants increased their rating regarding the importance of making this movement towards family-centered practice. In addition, they demonstrated heightened interest and enthusiasm for "making it happen." There was no change in rating with relation to the training group's commitment to provide leadership to colleagues. The pretest/ posttest score results were the second lowest at 3.88. (Three participants indicated a rating of '3'; three indicated '4'; two indicated '5'.) This contrasts with the management team's posttest rating of 4.75. Although the recorded level of importance, interest and enthusiasm was consistently over 4.0 in training group's posttest scores, there was a significant range in the commitment to provide leadership. The second outcome for objective 3 states that the trainee self-evaluation will produce an increased commitment to provide leadership in family support and was designed to develop the coordinators into "Champions of Family Support" within the agency. The posttest results indicate that organizational leadership provided by the 'graduates' of the practicum training group will be varied.

Training participants' anecdotal comments to the posttest question, "Do you feel more prepared to 'champion' family-centered child care with your colleagues as a result of your participation in these training sessions," highlight some key issues related to leadership. The comments from four of the eight training participants indicate some degree of discomfort in giving formal leadership as 'champions' in family-centered child care with their colleagues. This contrasts with their positive feedback regarding a movement towards family-centered child care and their interest in seeing this movement take place. The following excerpts from the posttest response to this question describe their concerns:

- "Somewhat more - However am nervous about this role [champion] at this point; this is why I'm in favor of a process for colleagues to go through a similar (although shorter) training."

- Yes, I feel that the process would be an advantage to enable [our agency] once colleagues have had an overview, so I don't sound like I know it all."

These four respondents expressed ambivalence about their role as champions in spite of the fact that they endorsed the new approach to working with families. They have identified some of the challenges that are associated with organizational change that were presented by Heil, Parker and Tate in Chapter 2. Many of these participants have encouraged the agency to make training available for their colleagues.

50% of the training participants confirmed that they were prepared to assume the role of champion. The following comments provide insight into their decisions:

- "Yes, these training sessions have given me a basic working knowledge of the principles and practices. I can now explain what the support entails and how I provide it currently. It also makes it possible for me to recognize where things need to change."
- "Yes, well, I feel that I've always been a supporter of parents and their issues so I would be suited to advocate for this project. The sessions highlighted my belief in family-centered child care and provided me with information and data which supported these beliefs.

Question 13 gave staff the opportunity to identify what information they needed to continue this movement towards family-centered practice. Staff included the following:

- additional information on other organizations that are further along in the process as well as on various models of home-based child care.
- further training to build on their practice skills for supporting parents and caregivers
- information from parents on their expectations from this family day care agency

- information on community resources and training resources

Increase agency resources for enhancing family support practices

The outcome for objective 4 was to develop a 'customized training package' that could be used by the family day care agency. Managers and coordinators have indicated a need to conduct formal training for staff who did not have the opportunity to participate in the practicum intervention. However, the design and content will not be resolved until the full staff consultation process has been completed. In the interim, managers and coordinators indicated in weekly training evaluations that they were immediately incorporating materials from the training into their work. A number of coordinators shared the reading materials that had been distributed during training with their colleagues. In addition, new books that were used during training were purchased for the agency resource library. The program resource consultant indicated that resource materials from the practicum training could be effectively incorporated into the caregiver training. Managers also reported that they planned to use handouts, case studies and the video, Our Families Our Future, in their supervisory sessions in their own regions. Although a formal training package has not be produced, the resources for enhancing professional staff practices in family support were significantly enhanced as a result of the practicum project.

Unanticipated outcomes

Clearly, managers were insistent that the next step must be an agency-wide consultation that involved all staff in the discussion of the draft position paper and its implications. In the final workshop, managers refused to formally articulate additional action steps or to institutionalize changes until this full discussion with professional staff took place. In reality, a number of changes did occur that were influenced by or directly related to the discussions that took place in the practicum groups. These support the work of McNeil, Zimmerman and Hurst who suggested that leaders who are facilitating the organizational change process should be prepared for different strategies to emerge as staff become actively involved and committed to the process. The following examples demonstrate outcomes that were not specifically planned within the practicum strategy:

- Immediately after the last management work group, the agency's program director and managers for group programs arranged to make presentations for child care center supervisors. (The two managers for child care group centers had been full participants in the practicum management workshops.) In addition, evening workshops that focused on family-centered child care were booked for the agency's child care teachers. Although the practicum project specifically focused on the family day care component of the program, the management team extended the application to the 21 child care centers. This demonstrated a clear sense of ownership and commitment to the movement towards family-centered child care. By the end of the last workshop, managers had developed a process so that every child care coordinator and center supervisor within the agency would have an opportunity to review and provide input into the work produced by the practicum groups in the following eight week period.
- A committee was established and included representatives from management, child care center supervisors and coordinators. They are developing a training package on "excellence in customer service." The committee had already begun to incorporate the family-centered child care approaches that were discussed during the practicum into their work.

In her article, "The Challenges of Empowerment in the Family Supports Movement", Dr. Heather Weiss suggests that it is a difficult challenge to implement the principles of family support. This quotation was read at the end of the third management workshop. It seemed to reassure managers who were in the midst of identifying challenges associated with the move to family-centered practice.

> It takes time for a program to work through . . . difficult issues in their work with families and to get to the point where they feel that their everyday practice reflects the principles of family support. It takes time to develop a staff that according to Provence and Naylor, can meet the central challenges of working with parents; a staff that can 'distinguish their work . . .between outreach and intrusiveness, between guiding parents and lecturing them, between providing them with tangible supports they appear to need and enabling them to get these for themselves, between imposing, even in a benevolent fashion, one's own goals for them and helping them to define and consider their goals for themselves'. It takes time to develop programs that provide education and support to different kinds of parents (Weiss, p. 5).

Although it will be a long journey, effective first steps have been taken successfully in the movement towards enhancing family support practice at the family day care agency.

Chapter VI

Conclusion - Implications and Recommendations

In Chapter VI, there is a brief review of the practicum outcomes. This is followed by a discussion of key issues that were identified during the practicum and their implications for future work in family-centered child care in the context of a family day care agency. Recommendations that have been developed as result of the practicum project are also included.

Conclusions

The goal of facilitating the process of moving the family day care agency towards a more family-centered approach in its work with families was achieved. Managers and training participants demonstrated an overall increase in their understanding of specific family support concepts. The majority reported an increased commitment to provide leadership in family support within the agency. A discussion paper which outlines the guiding principles of family-centered child care with a description of relevant agency policies and practices was produced by the management team in consultation with the training group. Although a customized training package was not completed by the end of the practicum, significant resources were provided to agency staff throughout the practicum implementation.

Training participants stressed the need to continue this process towards family-centered child care: " It is so timely! We should keep up the momentum and move on without waiting too long." Within an eight week period after the practicum implementation, meetings were scheduled so that all staff could participate in a consultative process that would focus on family-centered child care. Based on the coordinators' recommendations, a small group design will continue to be utilized. One staff explained that "in a large group, you fade into the wall paper. A small group feels safer. We know each other so well and it also is more conducive to the subject."

As the practicum project moved to the mid-point, participants assumed ownership of the training process. Both the managers and coordinators began adapting the practicum sessions in order that they could discuss the following:

(1) practical problems related to the application of family support concepts;

(2) mechanisms for receiving meaningful input from families regarding their family's experience with the family day care agency;

(3) clearer guidelines and job expectations regarding communication with families;

(4) new ways of delivering services that are 'family friendly';

(5) additional ways of supporting families

This was a positive outcome of the ten week practicum project. Feedback from weekly evaluations indicated that practicum participants recognized that "this is where the hardest work begins!"

Key issues and their implications and recommendations

(1) Funding:

Recommendation 1: The family day care agency needs to research new avenues of funding to enhance their work in family support.

Funding issues will provide one of the most significant obstacles for building linkages between early childhood programs and family support as this 'work in progress' continues. In Ontario, Canada, in 1996, there is an increasing trend for governments (in the age of deficit reduction) to fund only services for high risk populations and even funding policies for child care are the target of a serious review. The move to broaden its support to ALL families is working against the 'political tide' in Canada in the mid 1990's. The report, Improving Ontario's Child Care System: Ontario's Child Care Review (August, 1996) was released during the practicum period. Although there continues to be a focus on services for high risk families, the report indicates that there may be a reallocation of funds to increase support to families as they choose their family day care home and may also include parent education in their mandate.

This practicum intervention was delivered within the existing financial resources of the agency. Supporting staff in reflecting on their beliefs regarding their work with families and identifying ways for the family day care agency to adapt from a traditional to a more family-centered approach was seen as an achievable (and affordable) first step in the movement to family-centered practice. "Examining each [family support] principle and premise in depth is a key element of understanding or, for long-time practitioners, introducing a new perspective on family support practice" (Family Resource Coalition, p. 113).

This agency's primary source of funding is targeted specifically for child care services. Many families pay the full fee for child care services. Families with lower incomes may qualify (through a means test) for financial assistance for their child care services. There is only limited funding (from United Way) in one regional office for family support. Beyond supporting the families' child care needs, this has a significant implications for this family day care agency's ability work with families in a more holistic way. Given the categorical nature of funding and the focus on 'high risk', the family day care agency needs to be resourceful in 'stretching' funding (or attracting new sources of funding) to provide more comprehensive support to families.

(2) Internal Issues:

Recommendation 2: The family day care agency needs to continue to review the organization's systems and make changes where required to ensure that they are conducive to family-centered practice.

The rapid growth that has occurred over the last 5 years has allowed the agency to provide child care services to an increased number of families across a large geographic area. The family day care agency has adopted a range of organizational systems and procedures that reflect good management practices while also ensuring that the external contractual agreements are respected across a large number of political jurisdictions. To some extent, regional variations also reflect the management style and strengths of individual managers and their staff. On one hand, variations have allowed the agency to experiment with a range of approaches for interacting with families. On the other hand, it became apparent that the local infrastructure had a significant impact on the staff's inclination and organizational capacity to support enhancements to family-centered practice. Overall, the variations have created confusion around agency requirements with regard to its work with families (eg. level of contact, type of contact and location for meeting with families).

Kagan recommended that organizations who are working towards family supportive practice "structure the transition from a program orientation to a systems orientation while maintaining quality" (p. 18). Although it is important to develop a common understanding of family support principles and to develop knowledgeable 'champions' to promote family supportive practice, work can only be effective within a system that allows family-centered practice to take place. The agency needs to continue its work to assess which systems and procedures meet the requirements for providing quality child care in a family supportive context. "Combining family support and child care in ways that retain the power of both the family-centered and child-centered elements is no easy task" (Larner, p. 29). A delicate balance must be maintained so that family support is promoted without undermining the delivery of quality child care.

(3) Leadership Issues:

Recommendation 3: The family day care agency needs to commit ongoing staff resources to family-centered child care.

Given the operational demands associated with delivering child care, I am concerned that the momentum towards family-centered practice may be lost by default. The old saying reminds us that the "squeaky wheel gets the oil." Anyone who has worked in child care knows that the demands (and surprises) are never-ending. It's the nature of the job! The practicum developed 'champions' within the organization who have the capacity to assist the organization in moving towards more family-centered practice. Coordinators and managers informally promoted family support practice with their colleagues by the end of the practicum. However, their current assignments may limit their ability to provide the level of organizational leadership that will ensure ongoing emphasis on family-centered child care.

To maintain momentum, the family day care agency needs to make a commitment to allocate staff resources for the work associated with enhancing family-centered child care.

It takes time to organize avenues for parent participation, whether they include

> volunteering in the program, joint participation on decision-making bodies, educational workshops, social activities or simply phone calls . . .Creative planning to produce events that are minimally intrusive and maximally rewarding is likely to be worth the effort (Larner, p. 30).

Organizationally, the family support staff function could be designed in a variety of ways. For example, one staff in each region could assume an "official" family support responsibility in addition to other assignments. This family support function could also be included within the program resource consultants' portfolio. Assuming funding was available, a separate family support staff position could be introduced. The(se) staff would 'orchestrate' the movement towards family-centered child care. Together with the staff who participated in the practicum training, they would assume the role of advocates for family-centered practice until it is woven into the 'operational fabric' of the organization.

Reservations regarding peer leadership were identified in the practicum project. Although coordinators demonstrated commitment to the move to family-centered child care, some were anxious when asked if they would assume a formal leadership role. In fact, these staff already were demonstrating leadership qualities with peers. 'Leadership' is a frightening concept to some people and has a range of meanings. Many staff do not recognize the informal leadership that they provide. If the evaluation question was reworded (eg. "Will you support this agency's attempts in whatever way you can to move in this direction?"), the results may have been different. In replicating this work, I would reword the question on leadership in order to avoid this problem (eg. "Are you willing to 'promote' this training in your regional office?").

(4) Recognition Issue:

Recommendation 4: The family day care agency should recognize and celebrate current work that demonstrates family-centered practice.

It is important to document and celebrate current successes in family-centered child care. The practicum interviews indicated that many staff had not had an opportunity to reflect on the importance of this component of their work or the vital role they play in supporting families. Throughout the practicum experience, a significant number of success stories were shared by managers and coordinators regarding their work (and caregivers' work) with families. Appendix D provides one example.

> It is a critical time to tell the success stories that family support offers: Many, many families are making it, in their own ways, in their own communities, through the assistance of empowering, common-sense services. Families are getting better, and children are getting opportunities for healthy development (Family Resource Coalition, 1996, p. 113).

Some staff needed reassurance that this transformation to family-centered practice was not a huge leap from their current practice. Other staff became defensive in the discussion regarding 'A Movement Towards Family-Centered Practice' because they responded that they were already practicing family support. Based on their feedback, the title of the discussion paper became 'Defining Family-Centered Practice' shortly after the completion of the practicum. Staff, as well as families, need to feel recognized and empowered in this move to family-centered practice!

(5) Family Involvement Issues

Recommendation 5: Mechanisms need to be developed to ensure that families are involved as full partners in the movement to family-centered practice.

The practicum design supported staff at different levels of the organization as they discussed, debated, considered, clarified, defined and developed an agency approach to family-centered child-care. Once the family day care staff have made a commitment to embark on the journey towards more family-centered practice, it is crucial that all families have a voice. The practicum design excluded two obvious players, the families using child care and the caregivers who provide child care.

A critical next step is to actively involve families in a dialogue to determine how they would envision this partnership. Mechanisms need to be developed that ensure that ongoing communication occurs between families and the family day care agency. "Family support calls for the development of a partnership in which the professional is not in charge but rather is a resource or facilitator for families to use on their own terms" (Family Resource Coalition, p. 114). Soliciting feedback from families could occur formally or informally in a variety of ways. This might include individual or group interviews (such as focus groups) with families who are currently involved with the agency. Opportunities to celebrate the contributions of families (similar to annual recognition for staff and caregivers) could become part of the life of the organization. Families will vary significantly in their need and interest in building this partnership. Some families may prefer to maintain the partnership in order to ensure that their child(ren) receive quality child care. Others will identify new ways to be involved.

Family support programs need to respond quickly to what they are learning about

> families; if they do not, they risk becoming irrelevant and ineffective . . . Since family support practice is based on close relationships and functional partnerships with families, programs [should be] well positioned to continuously implement what they learn from their "customers" in their design and administration (Pooley, p. 94).

(6) Caregivers Involvement Issues:

Recommendation 6. Involve the caregiver in developing the vision of family-centered practice in the family day care agency.

Over time, the position statement needs revision to reflect the tri-partnerships involved in the family day care agency. The discussion paper describes family-centered child care with reference to the families using child care and the role of the family day care agency. It is critical that caregivers have opportunities to provide input and influence the vision of family-centered practice in the family day care agency. Throughout the practicum interviews and training, participants shared stories that described the outstanding work of committed caregivers who had become supportive partners with families. Caregivers also should be given the opportunity to describe how they can best be supported in providing family-centered child care in their homes. Perhaps family-centered child care should be viewed even from a broader perspective by encompassing the support needs of caregiver's families.

The family day care agency continues to play a vital role in supporting caregivers and families. Even in the best family day care homes, the tensions and conflicts between families and caregivers (described in Chapter II) will not be be totally eliminated.

> Knowledgeable, sensitive, intermediaries [such as the staff in family day care

> agencies] are needed to impartially represent the perspectives of both parents and child care providers in order to facilitate understanding, communication, compromises and alternatives (Larner, p.31)

(7) Training Issues Relating to Family-Centered Child Care:

Recommendation 7: Leaders in family support need to continue to develop and share training resources that will increase staff capacity to adapt to work in partnership with families within the child care community.

It is important for leaders in the field of family support to continue to experiment with training models that enhance the knowledge and skills of practitioners who embrace family support principles. This will be particularly challenging in traditional social service agencies that are only beginning to apply the principles of family support. The practicum project demonstrated one approach for introducing family support concepts into a child care agency. Training focused on topics such as the principles of family support, assessing family strengths and building relationships with families. Practicum participants identified the need for further training to enhance their competencies in communicating effectively with families within the spirit of the newly defined approach to family-centered practice.

Dolores Norton recognizes that the future provides challenges as we attempt to educate professionals in family support. "Education of enough personnel for effective family support will take time, money, enormous creativity, and commitment . . . We have the responsibility to plan the high standards we wish to see in the future in regard to best practices and competencies" (Norton, p.435). Further work needs to be done to identify the 'best practices' in family-centered child care that incorporates the best practices of family support and early childhood education. Training needs to be developed to encourage these family-centered practices. Guidelines for Family Support Practice (Family Resource Coalition, 1996) was released during the practicum implementation and provides valuable resources for this work although adaptions will be required to reflect the unique characteristics of family day care.

We are fortunate that the field of family support draws on the expertise of many disciplines. In this practicum, in particular, I appreciated the professional support from many family support advocates across North America who are interested in expanding the training resources in family support. These include L. Lee from the Parents Services Project (PSP), M. E. O'Keeffe from Edmonds Community College, S. Yuan from The University Affiliated Program of Vermont, I. J. Kyle (doctoral student at the University of Guelph), D. Lero (University of Guelph), J. Pollard (Ryerson Polytechnic University) and J. M. Lee (Compassionate Leadership Program, The Centre for Creative Ministries). The support from staff at the Family Resource Coalition and the University of Pittsburgh (Office of Child Development) was also invaluable as they 'responded to a need' and provided me with a 'rough' draft copy of Learning to Be Partners: An Introductory Training Program for Family Support Staff. These leaders have actively modeled the principles of family support in their practice. It is crucial that family support leaders continue to document and share their experiences regarding the outcomes of their efforts to infuse family support principles and practices into traditional agencies that are committed to a change to family-centered practice.

In conclusion, the managers and coordinators who are involved in the practicum implementation have demonstrated a commitment to 'champion' the movement towards family-centered practice. Mary Larner recognizes the challenges that will be encountered by the family day care agency that has been the focus of this practicum work.

> Helping mainstream, typical early childhood programs function in ways that are truly supportive of families is a . . . difficult challenge, but it may be the most important one for us to meet . . .We must work to create and capitalize on opportunities to move typical child care of preschool programs in the direction of family-supportive practice (Larner, pp. 29-30).

Our compass points in the direction of change . . . The journey will be full of surprises and challenges but the destination is clear. By combining the best practices of family support and early childhood education, we hope to build dynamic partnerships that will nurture and support each participant as they grow and develop to their full potential.

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APPENDIX A

Highlights of Topics Covered in the Practicum Workshops and Training Sessions

Highlights of Topics Covered in the Practicum Workshops and Training Sessions

The practicum intervention involved intensive work on a short-term basis with two agency staff groups. The key content areas for each management workshop and in-service training course are presented.

Management Workshops

Workshop 1:

- Why should we focus on family-centered child care?
- Consideration of the impact of personal and professional history, values and beliefs on agency practice
- Our Families Our Futures
  - Discussion of the philosophy, principles and practices of family support
  - Typical family support program components
- New approaches to practice
- Perspectives on partnerships with families

Workshop 2:

- Family systems theory and the application in a family day care agency
- An ecological approach to work with families
- Building on strengths rather than deficits
- Recognizing the driving forces of service
  - Family-centered, child-centered and systems-centered
  - A review of organizational policies and practices

Workshop 3:

- Enabling and empowering families
- Learning Partnerships
- Intake and assessment
- Drafting position paper on family-centered child care

Workshop 4:

- Finalize draft position paper
- Communicating the vision
- Endorsement of position paper by management team

In-service Training Course

Session 1:

- Why should we focus on family-centered child care?

  Emphasize the unique aspects of family support approach and reinforce the goal of incorporating this approach into an impressive array of skills and services

- Our Families Our Futures

  Thoughtful discussion on the philosophy, principles and practices of family support programs

- Personal perceptions of family

  Family map exercise focuses on personal history, beliefs and values

Session 2:

- Family support principles and practice and typical family support program components

- Family Systems Approach in family support (Major emphasis)

  Discussed concepts of open and closed systems, family subsystems, family roles, boundaries, rules and definitions of the family
- An ecological approach to family support

  How does the ecological model relate to early childhood professionals?

  Guiding principles in family-centered child care
- Family Transitions and typical stages in the life cycle

  Includes interviews with single parent, two parent family, teen parent

Session 3:

- Family life cycle and family transitions (continued)

  Includes a brief focus on the interaction of developmental cycles
- Basic beliefs that influence program design

  Comparing and contrasting a traditional and ecological perspective
- Building Relationships with families

  Practitioners can build on strengths

Session 4:

- Enabling and Empowering Families
- Promote the use of existing strengths and capabilities to meet family needs
- Family level assessment and intervention guidelines

  Focus on needs and aspirations, strengths and capabilities of families and the role of the help-giver
- In-depth discussion about the agency's role in family support and some of the systemic problems (issues, challenges) associated with the application of family support

principles

Session 5:

- Characteristics of strong families
- Supports and Resources

  Formal and informal support

- Critique of the first draft of the discussion paper on family-centered child care

  (At management work group's request)

Session 6:

- Learning Partnerships
- Effective listening

  Focus on how training will effect future work with families

- Moving Towards Family-Centered Practice

  Development of examples of activities within the agency that reflect practices described in the draft position paper

- Input on strategies for communicating family support principles and practices to staff throughout the agency

APPENDIX B

Discussion Paper: Moving Towards Family-Centered Child Care

THIS PAPER IS DISTRIBUTED FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES

Moving Towards Family-Centered Child Care

'Family Day Care' is used as the name of the practicum agency in this position paper.

Prepared by: Family Day Care Management Work Group (September 4, 1996)

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Resources used for the development of the draft position paper include the following

(1) 'Guiding Principles for Family-Centered Child Care':
This section of the position paper was adapted from 'Creating Family-Centered Child Care Programs' (excerpted from the Child Care Bureau's Leadership Forum on Promoting Family-Centered Child Care) and was reported from the Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Child Care (National [USA] Child Care Information Center) in the ERIC EECE Newsletter Vol. 8, No.1, p.3, Spring 1996.
(2) 'The following endeavors to reflect family centered child care principles in policies and practices [and following content in position paper]'
This section was adapted from 'Moving Toward Family Centered Child Care: A Guide for Translating Principles into Program Policy and Practice'. Courtesy of Parent Services Project. Additional information can be obtained from PSP, 199 Porteous Ave., Fairfax, CA 94930.
(3) The statement 'Staff work to earn a family's trust and to maintain and develop relationships over time' was located in the circular, 'School linked services,' produced by the Family Resource Coalition, 200 South Michigan Ave., 16th Floor, Chicago, IL 60604.
(4) 'Parents are seen as multidimensional' was adapted from Chapter 2, Table 1 by Weissbourd (1987).

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Guiding Principles for Family-Centered Child Care

Family Day Care policies and practices are based on an underlying set of beliefs regarding families and the partnership between families and staff. The following principles guide the service delivery at Family Day Care.

- *Families are seen from an ecological perspective.*

  Children cannot be viewed as separate from their families nor can families be viewed separately from their communities or society at large. Decisions made on behalf of children must consider ways in which these various systems are interconnected.

- *Parents are seen as multidimensional.*

  Human development continues throughout life and parenthood. Although parents have the role of child rearers and providers, they also have additional roles, responsibilities, needs and aspirations.

- *It is not possible to accurately generalize about families.*

  Family Day Care staff take time to get to know family members and to support them in their goals for their children.

- *Families* are *the primary influence in the lives of their children.*

  Programs create an environment which reflects the culture, strengths, and desires of families for their children.

- *Families have strengths.*

  Families and child care professionals are partners who have the shared responsibility of doing the best for the children in their care. Family Day Care staff identify and build upon family strengths.

- *Families have something to offer child care professionals.*

  Traditionally, exchanges between parents and child care professionals have been viewed as a means of informing families about their child. While professionals may bring information to parents about child development and their experiences with children, families provide information about the individual child, across time and in a variety of settings.

- *Families experience multiple demands for their time and energy.*

  Employment, finances, housing, health care and transportation are some of the many issues facing families. A family's limited contact with child care programs should not be mistaken for lack of concern for their child.

- *There are many ways for a family to be 'involved' with their child's care.*

  It is important to provide a range of options for families to participate in this aspect of their child's life and to allow families to choose the type and level of participation which suits them.

The following describes ways that Family Day Care endeavors to reflect Family-Centered Child Care principles in its policies and practices:

I. Programs and Staff Support Family Members to Become Involved With Family Day Care.

- Programs provide high quality services for children and their families.
- Staff assist parents in encouraging and taking an active role in their child's development by suggesting activities which parents and children can do together.
- Families are given advance notice of events and activities and choice about participation.
- Staff personally invite parents to participate in Family Day Care events.
- Activities are scheduled at the convenience of families.
- A variety of activities are available which allow for parent choice.
- Parents are welcome to define the nature of their involvement.
- Extended family members and others significant to the family are welcome to participate.
- Staff show appreciation for parent contributions to program.
- Child care and food are provided at workshops, meetings and activities when appropriate.

II. Staff Promote Partnerships with Parents Which Are Reflected In Relationships and Communication.

- Staff communicate in ways which reflect respect and non-judgement.
- Staff demonstrate their respect for families as experts concerning their children.
- Staff offer child development and child rearing information and advice when parents identify a need for assistance or request information and support.
- Staff greet the adults as well as the children during pick up and drop off times.
- Staff learn parent preferences regarding what they would like to be called. Staff use parent's name (eg. Cathy or Mrs. McKay rather than "Mark's mom").

- Staff work to earn a family's trust and to maintain and develop relationships over time.

- Staff and parents regularly assess program services and components to assure that family choices guide services.

- Staff and parents have a respectful process for resolving disagreements.

III. Program and Staff Honour Family Diversity and Values

- Programs define "parent" and "family" to include all who are significant to the child.

- Staff show a genuine interest in each family.

- Staff make a deliberate effort to involve parents in their child's care experience.

- When necessary, arrangements for interpreters and written translation are made available to assist in effectively providing information and services in the languages of participating families.

- Programs encourage families to share cultural practices, celebrations, food etc.

- Staff continue to be aware of the impact of cultural differences in child rearing.

- Staff adhere to Family Day Care anti-racism policy and participate in training opportunities that focus on diversity.

IV. Staff Support Parents' Efforts To Advocate For Their Child

- Staff find out family customs and preferences regarding child rearing, health practices, language, and culture during intake and on an ongoing basis.

- Staff view parent "complaints" and "concerns" as a positive reflection of parent self advocacy.

- Staff respond to parent concerns by working with parents toward resolution.

- Staff are flexible in trying to meet unusual individual requests.

- Staff advocate with parents who have special needs which are not within defined rules and policies.

- Programs have a process for receiving feedback from families about policies, programs and practices.

- Staff include parents in planning and implementing public advocacy efforts.

V. Staff Encourage Parent-to-Parent Support and Networking

- Parents are introduced to one another and are encouraged to get to know other parents.
- Social activities are scheduled regularly so parents have opportunities to meet with other parents.
- Staff ask family members to share skills and talents.
- Family Day Care offers opportunities for parent education as a strategy of family support.

VI. Family Day Care is committed to the principles of family support.

- Staff development activities are provided to help staff develop the ability and readiness to establish mutual partnerships with parents.
- Staff are encouraged to be introspective, to reflect on their own biases, values and perceptions in their work with parents.
- Staff and their families are invited to participate in family events as "participants."
- Staffs relationships reflect the principles of family support.

VII. Family Day Care Works to Create a Sense of Community and Establishes Linkages Between Families and the Larger Community

- Staff provide information to parents on community programs, events and issues.
- Family Day Care participates with families in community events.
- Family Day Care establishes linkages to community resources and public agencies to increase families' access to services.
- Staff work to create smooth transitions for families using other systems.
- Family Day Care works collaboratively with others in the community to advocate for families.

Appendix C

In Search of Best Practices

In Search of Best Practices

The following topics provide examples of the issues that were discussed in the Management Work Group and In-Service Training Course as participants considered the movement towards enhanced family-centered practice:

(i) Coordinator and family roles in home selection:

A significant role of the coordinator is to assist parents in articulating their child care needs while identifying their criteria for the child care placement. When feasible, parents should be given opportunities to make an informed **choices** between a number of family day care homes. This is in contrast to the practice in which the coordinator **matches** a family and caregiver based on their professional assessment regarding "what this family needs." Ideally, this placement process should be consistent for families who pay full fee or receive financial assistance. In other words, ALL families should have choices when choices are available. Participants recognized that there are some situations where it may be difficult to provide a number of options for families (eg. limited notice for finding a home, limited availability of caregivers within the community).

(ii) The family day care agency will work to establish a consistent relationship between one coordinator and family:

During the practicum proposal stage, a number of coordinators were moved to different communities and case loads were reassigned. In a child care agency serving a large geographic area factors such as expansion, staff turnover and staff leaves make these transfers unavoidable. When a meaningful relationship has already been established between the coordinator and the family, these staffing changes may undermine the partnership relationship. In management discussions during the practicum workshops, the importance of maintaining a consistent relationship between staff and families was re-emphasized.

(iii.) Intake interviews must be designed so that they are conducive to building future partnerships:

The first meeting between coordinators and families involves the collection of information that is pertinent for child care. In many cases, this intake interview may be the only personal (face-to-face) contact between the coordinator and parent until the following year. Practicum participants recognized the challenges associated with building a personal partnership when the relationship is maintained primarily by telephone. Staff raised a number of questions that were not easily resolved including:

- How can family support beyond the provision of quality child care occur when the contact is by telephone and may only occur on a monthly basis?
- How can the agency communicate a message to families that the coordinators is available as a resource/ support for the family that extends beyond their child care needs?

Managers will continue to explore solutions after the practicum project has been completed.

(iv) Financial assessment procedures need to be reviewed within the context of family-centered practice:

When parents are paying the full fee for their child care, intake interviews focus primarily on the families' needs and expectations regarding child care. There is voluntary sharing of information that is pertinent to the provision of child care (eg. family routines) as well as the collection of information that is essential for the delivery of quality child care (eg. the child's medical information etc). However, when families need financial assistance, they are required to complete an assessment process (ie. means test) to become eligible for child care. This requirement may have an impact on the agency's ability to establish a meaningful partnership between parents and coordinators.

The intake and assessment procedure varies across the three regional offices. In Region 1, parents complete a financial eligibility interview in the government child care office prior to meeting with an agency intake worker. Their meeting with the coordinator is the third step in the intake process. In Region 2, the eligibility interview is conducted by an agency assessment worker who immediately refers the family to a coordinator who addresses the child care needs of the family. In Region 3, coordinators actually manage intake and the financial eligibility interview and are able to focus on the family's child care requirements within the first interview. Coordinators in this region reported that their responsibilities related to fee assessment, follow up and financial administration took approximately 1/2-2/3 of their time. When this was combined with monthly visits to the caregivers' homes, limited time was available for additional family support functions.

Training participants shared their concerns regarding the dilemmas that were associated with conducting financial assessment and providing family support. Some staff commented that the current subsidy system made some families feel more dependent than independent as well as vulnerable rather than empowered. At a time when staff are trying to establish a partnership with parents, coordinators are sensitive that they are in a position of power based on their authority relative to the subsidy system. They reported that some parents receiving fee assistance were anxious about sharing personal or financial information even though they needed support. Participants in the training sessions suggested that it was difficult to know how to best support families while at the same time meeting their obligations to monitor the subsidy system.

> Morgan (1980) and Sale(1980) suggest that the regulation and provision of support functions should be separated. True consultation is a relationship voluntarily entered into by both parties and freely ended by either party at any time. That characteristic can never be present in consultation from a regulatory agency (Doherty, 1987, p. 42).

Needless to say, the depth of the discussions and the dilemmas that were raised relating to intake and assessment underlined that this movement towards family-centered child care was complex. Staff discussed various approaches for establishing the partnership relationships with families while maintaining responsibility for administering the financial assistance process. Once again, there were no "quick fix" answers or simple solutions. The concerns that were raised will continue to be discussed by staff as the agency applies "principles of family-centered practice" to a systems review in areas such as intake procedures.

Appendix D

One Success Story: A Case Study

ONE SUCCESS STORY

Debra, a teenage mother with a 6 month old came to us through CAS when she was at risk of losing her child. Debra had been in an abusive relationship and was now living on her own with very little family support or training. She rejected most of the help offered to her by; CAS, public health, probation, principal and her mom but developed a strong bond with the FDC caregiver almost immediately and a trusting relationship with the Coordinator over a period of time.

Initially the FDC Coordinator worked with Debra to establish her eligibility for fee assistance. After that was determined the Coordinator set up a preplacement with the caregiver she felt was best suited to meet this families needs. Once Debra's son was in care the Coordinator maintained consistent communication with the caregiver and other community officials involved with this family. Over the duration of this placement the Coordinators' role has been to provide continual support and advice to both the caregiver and parent. When necessary the Coordinator provided the appropriate information and resources for the caregiver to assist the parent in accessing resources such as: food banks, clothing exchanges, shelters, drop-in parent programs, etc.

Debra's goals when she started with us were to keep her child, access affordable child care, get a high school education and improve her parenting skills. Debra's son is now a healthy, happy two year old, she has her first part-time job and will returned to high school in September to complete her last year. Debra's parenting skills have improved greatly, to the point which CAS and Public Health are no longer involved. Debra and her mother now have a very strong relationship and her mother has developed a strong respect for her daughter.

Debra's ability to accept the help offered by the caregiver was the turning point in their relationship and her relationship with FDC. Debra is now well on her way to becoming more independent, self-sufficient and to reaching the goals she's worked very hard to achieve.

Appendix E

Getting Involved with Family Support - Pretest/ Posttest Evaluation Forms

Getting Involved With Family Support

Please complete the ratings for the following questions. Answer as honestly as possible. Don't worry . . .your individual scores will remain confidential. Your responses will assist me in reviewing the course content at the end of the summer. For each item, circle your answer.

	low				high
1.Partnerships between parents and professionals:					
*My understanding of this concept	1	2	3	4	5
*The relevance of this concept to my work	1	2	3	4	5
*My intention to use this knowledge in my work is	1	2	3	4	5
2.Family-centered service:					
*My understanding of this concept	1	2	3	4	5
*The relevance of this concept to my work	1	2	3	4	5
*My intention to use this knowledge in my work is	1	2	3	4	5
3.Positive, strengths-based approach to families					
*My understanding of this concept	1	2	3	4	5
*The relevance of this concept to my work is	1	2	3	4	5
*My intention to use this knowledge in my work is	1	2	3	4	5
4.An ecological approach to families					
*My understanding of this concept	1	2	3	4	5
*The relevance of this concept to my work is	1	2	3	4	5
*My intention to use this knowledge in my work is	1	2	3	4	5

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	low				high
5.Interdependence					
*My understanding of this concept	1	2	3	4	5
*The relevance of this concept to my work	1	2	3	4	5
*My intention to use this knowledge in my work is	1	2	3	4	5
How do you feel at this moment?					
6.In my opinion,the importance of making this transition from child-centered to family-centered practice is	1	2	3	4	5
7.At this time, my interest in changing the way our agency works with families is	1	2	3	4	5
8.My commitment to provide leadership to my colleagues in family support is	1	2	3	4	5
9.My enthusiasm for introducing family support principles into the agency's practices is	1	2	3	4	5
10. I feel that I can describe family support to other staff in our agency . . .	1	2	3	4	5

Thanks for the feedback!

Getting Involved with Family Support (Continued)

The following questions were added to the posttest evaluation for the practicum groups:

Management Work Group:

11. What were 2-3 main points that we discussed this summer that are most useful to your work? How do you plan to use these in your work?

12. What is the activity/ project/ plan that you most want to work on?

13. What do you want information on the most as you continue to move towards family-centered practice?

In-Service Training Group:

11. What were the 2-3 main points that we discussed this summer that are most useful in your work? How do you plan to use these in your work?

12. Do you feel more prepared to 'champion' family-centered child care with your colleagues at this agency as a result of your participation in this training session? Please take a minute to explain your answer.

13. What do you want information on the most as you continue to move towards family-centered practice?

Appendix F

Exploring Family Support - Weekly Feedback Forms

Management Work Group

Exploring Family Support

. . . Some thoughts on today's session . . .

Week- ____

Your comments will assist in the planning of the next sessions of the management work group:

1. Which part(s) of this session (if any) did you consider most important for yourself?

2. Which part(s) of this session (if any) did you consider least important for you?

3. Do you intend to use any of the materials presented today in your work?
   If yes, which ones?

4. Was today's session relevant to your work? Explain.

5. Did today's presentations and discussions on family support provide any new ideas on how we might better work with families (eg. agency policies and practices; program development thrusts etc.)

6. Any other comments or suggestions for our next sessions:

In service Training Sessions

Exploring Family Support

. . . Some thoughts on today's session . . .

Week-___

Please help plan future in-service training by providing feedback on today's session.

1. Which part of this session (if any) did you consider most important for yourself?

2. Which part of the session (if any) did you consider least important to you?

3. Were there any sections/ exercises that you particularly liked? Why?

4. Were there any sessions that you particularly disliked? Why?

5. Do you intend to use any of the materials for your work? If yes, which ones?

6. Was today's session relevant to your work? Explain.

7. Did today's presentations and discussions provide any ideas on how we might add family support in its policies or practices?

Thank you